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THE

ROMANCE OF WAR:

OR,

THE HIGHLANDERS IN SPAIN.

BY

JAMES GRANT, ESQ.,

Late 62nd Regiment.

(AUTHOR OF THE SCOTTISH CAVALIER, &c.)

"In the garb of old Gaul, with the fire of old Rome,
From the heath-covered mountains of Scotia we come;
Our loud-sounding pipe breathes the true martial strain,
And our hearts still the old Scottish valour retain."

LT.-GEN. ERSKINE.

FIRST SERIES.

LONDON:
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & CO., SOHO SQUARE.

1850.

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LONDON:
Printed by COX (Brothers) & WYMAN, 74-75, Great Queen Street,
Lincoln's-Inn Fields.

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PREFACE.

NOTWITHSTANDING so many able military narratives have of late years issued from the press relative to the glorious operations of the British Army, for rescuing Portugal and Spain from the grasp of the invader, the Author believes that the present work is *the first* which has been almost exclusively dedicated to the Adventures of a Highland Regiment, during the last War; and he flatters himself that it will not be found deficient in novelty and interest. He acknowledges that, according to precedent, scenes and incidents have been introduced into it which are purely imaginary, and whether he ought to apologize for these, or to make a merit of them, he must leave his readers to decide, according to their individual tastes and predilections.

It will need no great sagacity to discriminate between this portion and the veritable historical and military details, the result of the experience of one* who had the honour of serving in that gallant corps to which these volumes more especially relate, during the whole of its brilliant course of service in the Peninsula, and who participated in all the proud feelings which arose when contemplating the triumphant career of an army, whose deeds and victories are unsurpassed in the annals of war.

Most of the military operations, and many of the characters, will be familiar to the survivors of the second division, and brother-officers will recognise many old associates in the convivialities of the mess-table, and in the perils of the battle-field. The names of others belong to history, and with them the political or military reader will be already acquainted.

Few—few indeed of the old corps are now alive; yet these all remember, with equal pride and sorrow,

> "How, upon bloody Quatre Bras,
> Brave CAMERON heard the wild hurra
> Of conquest as he fell;"

and, lest any reader may suppose that in these volumes the national enthusiasm of the Highlanders has been over-drawn, I shall state one striking incident which occurred at Waterloo.

* A near relation of the author.

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On the advance of a heavy column of French infantry to attack La Haye Sainte, a number of the Highlanders sang the stirring verses of "Bruce's Address to his Army," which, at such a time, had a most powerful effect on their comrades; and long may such sentiments animate their representatives, as they are the best incentives to heroism and to honest emulation!

It is impossible for a writer to speak of his own production, without exposing himself to imputations of either egotism or affected modesty; the Author therefore will merely add, that he trusts that most readers may discover something to attract in these volumes, which depict from the life the stirring events and all the romance of warfare, with the various lights and shades of military service, the principal characters being members of one of those brave regiments, which, from their striking garb, national feelings, romantic sentiments, and *esprit de corps*, are essentially different from the generality of our troops of the line.

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THE ROMANCE OF WAR.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

"Still linger in our northern clime
Some remnants of the good old time;
And still within our valleys here
We hold the kindred title dear;
Even though perchance its far-fetched claim,
To Southron ear, sounds empty name;
For course of blood, our proverbs deem,
Is warmer than the mountain stream."

Marmion, canto vi.

In the Highlands of Perthshire a deadly feud had existed, from time immemorial, between the Lisles of Inchavon and the Stuarts of Lochisla. In the days when the arm of the law was weak, the proprietors had often headed their kinsmen and followers in encounters with the sword, and for the last time during the memorable civil war of 1745-6. But between the heads of the families, towards the latter end of the last century (the period when our tale commences), although the era of feudal ideas and outrages had passed away, the spirit of transmitted hatred, proud rivalry, and revenge, lurked behind, and a feeling of most cordial enmity existed between Stuart and Lisle, who were ever engaged in vexatious lawsuits on the most frivolous pretences, and constantly endeavouring to cross each other's interests and intentions—quarrelling at public meetings—voting on opposite sides—prosecuting for trespasses—and opposing each other everywhere, "as if the world was not wide enough for them both;" and on one occasion a duel would have ensued but for the timely interference of the sheriff.

Sir Allan Lisle of Inchavon, a man of a quiet and most benevolent disposition, was heartily tired of the trouble given him by the petty jealousy of his neighbour Stuart, a proud and irritable Highlander, who would never stoop to reconciliation with a family whom his father (a grim *duinhe-wassal* of the old school) had ever declared to him were the hereditary foes of his race. The reader may consider it singular that such antiquated prejudices should exist so lately as the end of the last century; but it must be remembered that the march of intellect has not made such strides in the north country as it has done in the Lowlands, and many of the inhabitants of Perthshire will recognise a character well known to them, under the name of Mr. Stuart.

It must also be remembered, that he was the son of a man who had beheld the standard of the Stuarts unfurled in Glenfinan, and had exercised despotic power over his own vassals when the feudal system existed in its full force, before the act of the British Parliament abolished the feudal jurisdictions throughout Scotland, and absolved the unwilling Highlanders from allegiance to their chiefs.

Sir Allan Lisle (who was M.P. for a neighbouring county) was in every respect a man of superior attainments to Stuart,—being a scholar, the master of many modern accomplishments, and having made the grand tour. To save himself further annoyance, he would gladly have extended the right hand of fellowship to his stubborn neighbour, but pride forbade him to make the first advances.

The residence of this intractable Gael was a square tower, overgrown with masses of ivy, and bearing outwardly, and almost inwardly, the same appearance as when James the Fifth visited it once when on a hunting excursion. The walls were enormously thick; the grated windows were small and irregular; a corbelled battlement surmounted the top, from the stone bartizan of which the standard of the owner was, on great days, hoisted with much formality by Donald Iverach, the old piper, or Evan his son, two important personages in the household of the little tower.

This primitive fortalice was perched upon a projecting craig, which overhung the loch of Isla, a small but beautiful sheet of water, having in its centre an islet with the ruins of a chapel. The light-green birch and black sepulchral pine, flourishing wild and thickly, grew close to the edge of the loch, and cast their dark shadows upon its generally unruffled surface. Around, the hills rose lofty, precipitous, and abrupt from the margin of the lake; some were covered with foliage to the summit, and others, bare and bleak, covered only with the whin-bush or purple heather, where the red roe and the black cock roved wild and free; while, dimly seen in the distance, rose the misty crest of Benmore (nearly four thousand feet above the level of the sea), the highest mountain, save one, in Perthshire.

A little *clachan*, or hamlet, consisting of about twenty green thatched cottages clustered together, with kail-yards behind, occupied the foot of the ascent leading to the tower; these were inhabited by the tenants, farm-servants, and herdsmen of Stuart. The graceful garb of the Gael was almost uniformly worn by the men; and the old wives, who in fine weather sat spinning on the turf-seats at the doors, wore the simple *mutch* and the varied tartan of their name. The wife of this Highland castellan had long been dead, as were their children excepting one son, who was almost the only near *kinsman* that Stuart had left.

Ronald was a handsome youth, with a proud dark eye, a haughty lip, and a bold and fearless heart,—possessing all those feelings which render the Scottish Highlander a being of a more elevated and romantic cast than his Lowland neighbours. He was well aware of the groundless animosity which his father nourished against Sir Allan Lisle; but as in the course of his lonely rambles, fishing, shooting, or hunting, he often when a boy encountered the younger members of the Inchavon family, and as he found them agreeable companions and playmates, he was far from sharing in the feelings of his prejudiced father. He found Sir Allan's son, Lewis Lisle, an obliging and active youth, a perfect sportsman, who could wing a bird with a single ball, and who knew every corrie and chasm through which the wandering Isla

flowed, and the deep pools where the best trout were always to be found.

In Alice Lisle Ronald found a pretty and agreeable playmate in youth, but a still more agreeable companion for a solitary ramble as they advanced in years; and he discovered in her splendid dark eyes and glossy black hair charms which he beheld not at home in his father's mountain tower.

During childhood, when the days passed swiftly and happily, the brother and sister, of a milder mood than Ronald Stuart, admired the activity with which he was wont to climb the highest craigs and trees, swinging himself, with the dexterity of a squirrel, from branch to branch, or rock to rock, seeking the nests of the eagle or raven, or flowers that grew in the clefts of Craigonan, to deck the dark curls of Alice. Still more were they charmed with the peculiarity of his disposition, which was deeply tinged with the gloomy and romantic,—a sentiment which exists in the bosom of every Highlander, imparted by the scenery amidst which he dwells, the lonely hills and silent shores of his lochs, pathless and solitary heaths, where cairns and moss-covered stones mark the tombs of departed warriors, pine-covered hills, frowning rocks, and solitary defiles,—all fraught with traditions of the past, or tales of mysterious beings who abide in them. These cause the Gaelic mountaineer to be a sadder and more thoughtful man than the dwellers in the low country, who inhabit scenes less grand and majestic.

In the merry laugh and the gentle voice of Alice, Ronald found a charm to wean him from the tower of Lochisla, and the hours which he spent in her society, or in watching the windows of her father's house, were supposed to be spent in search of the black cock and the fleet roes of Benmore; and many a satirical observation he endured, in consequence of bringing home an empty game-bag, after a whole day's absence with his gun.

Ronald enjoyed but little society at the tower. His father, in consequence of the death of his wife and younger children, and owing to many severe losses which he had sustained in the course of his long series of litigations, had become a moody and silent man, spending his days either in reading, or in solitary rides and rambles. His voice, which, when he did speak, was authoritative enough and loud, was seldom heard in the old tower, where the predominant sounds were the grunting tones of Janet, the aged housekeeper, who quarrelled continually with Donald Iverach, the piper, whenever the latter could find time, from his almost constant occupations of piping and drinking, to enjoy a skirmish with her.

As years crept on, the friendship between the young people strengthened, and in the breasts of Alice and Ronald Stuart became a deeper and a more absorbing feeling, binding them "heart to heart, and mind to mind," and each became all the world unto the other. To them there was something pleasing and even romantic in the strange secrecy they were necessitated to use; believing that, should their intercourse ever come to the ears of their parents, effectual means would be taken to put a stop to it.

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CHAPTER II.

INTERVIEWS.

"And must I leave my native isle—
Fair friendship's eye—affection's smile—
The mountain's sport—the angler's wile—
The birch and weeping willow, O!
The Highland glen—the healthy gale—
The gloaming glee—the evening tale—
And must I leave my native vale,
And brave the boisterous billow, O!"

Hogg's Forest Minstrel.

"ALICE! my own fair Alice! my hard destiny ordains that I must leave you," was the sorrowful exclamation of Ronald one evening, as he joined Alice at their usual place of meeting, a solitary spot on the banks of the Isla, where the willow and alder-bush, overhanging the steep rocks, swept the dark surface of the stream.

"Leave me! O Ronald, what can you mean?" was the trembling reply of the fair girl, as she put her arm through his, and gazed anxiously on the troubled countenance of her lover.

"That I must go—far from you and the bonnie banks of the Isla. Yes, Alice; but it is only for a short time, I trust. Of the embarrassed state of my father's affairs, by his long lawsuits and other matters, I have acquainted you already, and it has now become necessary for me to choose some profession. My choice has been the army: what other could one, possessing the true spirit of a Highland gentleman, follow?"

"O Ronald! I ever feared our happiness was too great to last long. Ah! you *must* not leave me."

"Alice," replied the young Highlander, his cheek flushing while he spoke, "our best and bravest men are going forth in thousands to meet the enemies of our country, drenching in their blood the fatal peninsula; and can I remain behind, when so many of my name and kindred have fallen in the service of the king? Never has the honour of Scotland been tarnished by the few who have returned, nor lost by those who have fallen, in every clime where the British standard has been unfurled against an enemy. An ensigncy has been promised me; and in a Highland regiment, wearing the garb, inheriting the spirit of the Gael, and commanded by a grandson of the great Lochiel; and I cannot shrink when my father bids me go, although my heart should almost burst at leaving you behind, my own—own Alice!" and he pressed to his bosom the agitated girl, who seemed startled at the vehemence with which he had spoken.

"But hold, Alice," he added, on perceiving tears trembling on her dark eyelashes; "you must not give way thus. I will return, and all will yet be well. Only imagine what happiness will then be ours, should the families be on good terms, and I, perhaps, Sir Ronald Stuart, and knight of I know not how many orders?"

"Ah, Ronald! but think of how many have left their happy homes with hearts beating high with hope and pride, and left them never to return. Did not the three sons of your cousin of Strathonan leave their bones on the red sands of Egypt? and many more can I name. Ah! how I tremble to think of the scenes that poor soldiers must behold—scenes of which I cannot form even the slightest conception."

"These are sad forebodings," replied the young man, smiling tenderly, "and from the lips of one less young and less beautiful than yourself, might have been considered as omens of mischance. I trust, however, that I, who have so often shot the swiftest red roes in Strathisla, slept whole nights on the frozen heather, and know so well the use of the target and claymore (thanks to old Iverach), shall make no bad soldier or campaigner, and endure the hardships incident to a military life infinitely better than the fine gentlemen of the Lowland cities. The proud Cameron who is to command me will, I am sure, be my friend; he will not forget that his grandsire's life was saved by mine at Culloden, and he will regard me with the love of the olden time, for the sake of those that are dead and gone. Oh, Alice! I could view the bright prospect which is before me with tumultuous joy, but for the sorrow of leaving you, my white-haired father, and the bonnie braes and deep corries of Isla. But if with Heaven's aid I escape, promise, Alice, that when I return you will be mine,—mine by a dearer title than ever I could call you heretofore."

"Ronald—dearest Ronald! I will love you as I have ever done," she said in a soft yet energetic tone; "and I feel a secret voice within me which tells that the happy anticipations of the past will—will yet be accomplished." The girl laid her blushing cheek on the shoulder of the young man, and her dark thick curls, becoming free from the little cap or bonnet which had confined them, fell over his breast in disorder.

At that exciting moment of passion and mental tumult, Ronald's eye met a human countenance observing them sternly from among the leaves of the trees that flourished near them. The foliage was suddenly pushed aside, and Sir Allan Lisle appeared, scanning the young offenders with a stern glance of displeasure and surprise. He was a tall thin man, in the prime of life, with a fine countenance expressive of mildness and benevolence. He wore his hair thickly powdered, and tied in a queue behind. He carried a heavy hunting-whip in his hand, which he grasped ominously as he turned his keen eye alternately from the young man to his trembling daughter, who, leaning against a tree, covered her face with her handkerchief and sobbed hysterically. Ronald Stuart stood erect, and returned Sir Allan's glance as firmly and as proudly as he could, but he felt some trouble in maintaining his self-possession. His smart blue bonnet had fallen off, fully revealing his strongly-marked and handsome features, where Sir Allan read at once that he was a bold youth, with whom proud looks and hard words would little avail.

"How now, sir!" said he at length. "What am I to understand by all this? Speak, young gentleman," he added, perceiving that Ronald was puzzled, "answer me truly. As the father of this imprudent girl, I am entitled to a reply."

Ronald was about to stammer forth something.

"You are, I believe, the son of Stuart of Lochisla?" interrupted Sir Allan, sternly, "who is far from being a friend to me or mine. How long is it since you have known my daughter? and what am I to understand from the scene you have acted here?"

"That I love Miss Lisle with the utmost tenderness that one being is capable of entertaining for another," replied Ronald, his face suffusing with a crimson glow at the earnest confession. "Sir Allan, if you have seen what passed just now, you will perceive that I treat her

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with that respect and delicacy which the beauties of her mind and person deserve."

"This is indeed all very fine, sir! and very romantic too; but rather unexpected,—upon my honour rather so," replied the baronet sarcastically, as he drew the arm of the weeping Alice through his. "But pray, Master Stuart, how long has this clandestine matter been carried on? how long have you been acquainted?"

"From our earliest childhood, sir—indeed I tell you truly—from the days in which we used to gather wild flowers and berries together as little children. We have been ever together; a day has scarcely elapsed without our seeing each other; and there is not a dingle of the woods, a dark corrie of the Isla, or a spot on the braes of Strathonan, where we have not wandered hand in hand, since the days when Alice was a laughing little girl with flaxen curls until now, when she is become tall, beautiful, and almost a woman, with ringlets as black as the wing of the muircock. But your son Lewis will tell all these things better than I can, as I am rather confused just now, Sir Allan."

"'Tis very odd this matter has been concealed from me so long," said the other, softened by the earnest tone of the young man, who felt how much depended upon the issue of the present unlooked-for interview; "and if my ears have not deceived me, I think I heard you offer marriage to my foolish daughter on your return from somewhere?"

"It is very true, sir," replied the young man modestly.

"And pray, young sir, what are your pretensions to the hand of Miss Lisle?"

"Sir!" ejaculated Ronald, his cheek flushing and his eye sparkling at the angry inquiry of the other.

"I ask you, Mr. Stuart, what are they? Your father I know to be an almost ruined man, whose estates are deeply dipped and overwhelmed by bonds, mortgages, and what not. He has, moreover, been a deadly enemy to me, and has most unwarrantably ——"

"Oh, pray, papa! dear papa!" urged the young lady imploringly.

"Sir Allan Lisle," cried Ronald with a stern tone, while his heart beat tumultuously, "Lowland lawyers and unlooked-for misfortunes are, I know, completing our ruin, and the pen and parchment have made more inroads upon us than ever your ancestors could have done with all Perthshire at their back; but, truly, it ill becomes a gentleman of birth and breeding to speak thus slightingly of an old and honourable Highland family. If my father, inheriting as he does ancient prejudices, has been hostile to your interests, I, Sir Allan, never have been so; and the time was once, when a Lisle dared not have spoken thus tauntingly to a Stuart of the house of Lochisla."

Sir Allan admired the proud and indignant air with which the youth spoke; but he wished to humble him if possible, and deemed that irony was a better weapon than anger to meet the fiery young Highlander with. He gave a sort of tragi-comic start, and was about to make some sarcastic reply, when his foot caught the root of a tree; he reeled backward, and fell over the rocky bank into the Isla, which formed a deep, dark, and noiseless pool below.

A loud and startling cry burst from Alice as her father suddenly disappeared from her side.

"Save him, save him, Ronald! Oh, Ronald! if you love me, save my father!" she cried in accents at once soul-stirring and imploring, while she threw herself upon her knees, and, not daring to look upon

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the stream, covered her eyes with her hands, calling alternately upon Heaven and her lover, in tones which defy the power of language to describe, to save her father.

"Dearest Alice, calm yourself; be pacified,—he shall not perish," cried Ronald, whose presence of mind had never once forsaken him, as he cast aside his bonnet and short sporting coat, and gazed over the bank upon the rapid river running between two abrupt walls of rock, against the dark sides of which the spray and foam raised by Sir Allan's struggles was dashed. The latter was beating the water fruitlessly in the centre of the pool, where it was deep and the current strong; yet he made no outcry, as if unwilling to add to the distress which he knew his daughter already experienced.

He bestowed one look of terror and agony on Ronald, who instantly sprang off the precipitous rock, and swimming round him, strongly and vigorously in wide circles, caught him warily by the hair, and holding his head above the surface of the stream, swam down the current to a spot where the bank was less steep, and with some exertion landed him safely on the green turf, where he lay long speechless; while Alice wrung her hands, and wept in an ecstasy of terror, embracing her father and his preserver by turns. The latter, who was nothing the worse for his ducking, put on his bonnet and upper garment with perfect *sang-froid;* but it was some time before Sir Allan recovered himself so far as to be able to thank his preserver, who poured down his throat as he lay prostrate the contents of a metal hunting-flask, which he generally carried about with him filled with the best brandy, procured, by means unknown, duty free at Lochisla.

Shortly and emphatically did Sir Allan thank Ronald for the aid he had rendered, as he must inevitably have perished, being unable to swim, and having to contend with a strong current, which would soon have carried him over the high cascade of Corrie-avon. Ronald inwardly blessed the accident which had rendered Sir Allan so much his debtor, and wrought such a happy change of sentiment in his favour. He accompanied Alice and her father to one of the gate-lodges of Inghaven, and there resisting an earnest invitation to the house, he returned with all speed home, not ill-pleased with the issue of the day's adventures.

CHAPTER III.

A TRUE HIGHLANDER.

"Not much his new ally he loved,
Yet when he saw what hap had proved,
He greeted him right heartilie;
He would not waken old debate,
For he was void of rancorous hate,
Though rude and scant of courtesy."
The Last Minstrel, canto v.

ONE fine forenoon, a few days after the occurrences related in the last chapter, a horseman appeared, riding along the narrow uneven road leading by the banks of Lochisla towards the tower. It was Sir Allan Lisle, who came along at a slow trot, managing his nag with the ease and grace of a perfect rider, never making use of either whip or spur, but often drawing in his rein to indulge the pleasure and curi-

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osity with which he beheld (though accustomed to the splendid scenery of Perthshire) this secluded spot, which he had never seen before,—the black and solitary tower, the dark blue waveless loch, and the wild scenery by which it was surrounded.

As he advanced up the ascent towards the tower, his horse began to snort, shake its mane, and grow restive, as its ears were saluted by a noise to which they were unaccustomed.

Donald Iverach, the old piper of the family (which office his ancestors had held since the days of Robert the Second, according to his own account), was pacing with a stately air to and fro before the door of the fortalice, with the expanded bag of the *piob mhor* under his arm, blowing from its long chaunter and three huge drones "a tempest of dissonance;" while he measured with regular strides the length of the barbican or court, at one end of which stood a large stoup of whisky (placed on the end of a cask), to which he applied himself at every turn of his promenade to wet his whistle.

The piper, though of low stature, was of a powerful, athletic, and sinewy form, and although nearly sixty, was as fresh as when only sixteen; his face was rough and purple, from drinking and exposure to the weather; his huge red whiskers curled round beneath his chin and grew up to his eyes, which twinkled and glittered beneath their shaggy brows; a smart blue bonnet set jauntily, very much over the right eye, gave him a knowing look, and his knees, "which had never known covering from the day of his birth," where exposed by the kilt were hairy and rough as the hide of the roe-buck; his plaid waved behind, and a richly-mounted dirk, eighteen inches long, hanging on his right side, completed his attire.

Great was the surprise of the Celt when, on turning in his march, he suddenly beheld Sir Allan Lisle, whom he had not seen since the last year, when by the laird's orders he had endeavoured, by the overwhelming noise of his pipe, to drown a speech which the baronet was addressing to the electors of the county. But what earthly errand, thought Donald, could bring a Lisle up Strathisla, where one of the race had not been seen since the father of the present Sir Allan had beleaguered the tower in 1746 with a party of the Scottish Fusiliers. The chaunter fell from the hand of the astonished piper, and the wind in the bag of his instrument escaped with an appalling groan.

"My good friend, I am glad you have ceased at last," said Sir Allan; "I expected every moment that my horse would have thrown me. This fortress of yours will be secure against cavalry while you are in it, I dare swear."

"I dinna ken, sir," replied the piper, touching his bonnet haughtily; "but when pare-leggit gillies and red coats tried it in the troublesome times, they aye gat the tead man's share o' the deep loch below."

"Is your master—is Lochisla at home?"

"His honour the laird is within," replied Iverach, as Sir Allan dismounted and desired him to hold his horse.

"Lochisla's piper will hold nae man's bridle-rein, his honour's excepted," said the indignant Highlander; "put a common gillie may do tat. Holloa! Alpin Oig Stuart! Dugald! Evan! come an' hold ta shentleman's praw sheltie," shouted he, making the old barbican ring.

"One will do, I dare say," said Sir Allan, smiling as he resigned his nag to Evan, Iverach's son, a powerful young mountaineer, who appeared at his father's shout.

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Preceded by Donald, Sir Allan ascended the winding staircase of the tower, and was ushered into the hall, or principal apartment it contained, the roof of which was a stone arch. At one side yawned a large fire-place, on the mouldered lintel of which appeared the crest and badge-flower of the Stuarts,—a thistle, and underneath was the family motto, "*Omne solum forti patria.*" At each end of the chamber was a window of moderate size, with a stone mullion in the form of a cross; one commanded a view of the loch and neighbouring forests of birch and pine, and the other the distant outline of the high Benmore. The walls were adorned with apparatus for hunting, fishing, shooting, and sylvan trophies, intermixed with targets, claymores, Lochaber axes, old muskets, matchlocks, &c.

The furniture was of oak, or old and black mahogany, massive and much dilapidated, presenting a very different appearance to that in the splendid modern drawing-room at Inchavon. A few old portraits hung on the blackened walls, and one in particular, that of a stern old Highlander, whose white beard flowed over his belted plaid, seemed to scowl on Sir Allan, who felt considerably embarrassed when he unexpectedly found himself in the habitation of one whom he could not consider otherwise than as his foe.

While awaiting the appearance of the proprietor, whom the piper was gone to inform of the visit, Sir Allan's eye often wandered to the portrait above the fire-place, and he remembered that it was the likeness of the father of the present Stuart, who at the battle of Falkirk had unhorsed, by a stroke of his broad-sword, his (Sir Allan's) father, then an officer in the army of General Hawley. While Sir Allan mused over the tales he had heard of the grim Ian Mhor of Lochisla, the door opened, and Mr. Stuart entered.

Erect in person, stately in step, and graceful in deportment, strong and athletic of form, he appeared in every respect the genuine Highland gentleman. He was upwards of sixty, but his eye was clear, keen, and bright, and his weather-beaten cheek and expansive forehead were naturally tinged with a ruddy tint, which was increased to a flush by the excitement caused at this unlooked-for visit.

Unlike his servants, who wore the red tartan of their race, he was attired in the usual dress of a country gentleman, and wore his silver locks thickly and unnecessarily powdered, and clubbed in a thick queue behind.

The natural politeness and hospitable feeling of a Highlander had banished every trace of displeasure from his bold and unwrinkled brow, and he grasped Sir Allan's hand with a frankness at which the latter was surprised, as was old Janet the housekeeper, who saw through the keyhole what passed, though she was unable, in consequence of her deafness, to hear what was said.

"Be seated, Sir Allan," said Mr. Stuart, bowing politely, though he felt his stiffness and hauteur rising within him, and endeavoured to smother it. "To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit? which, I must have the candour to acknowledge, is most unexpected."

"Lochisla," replied the other, addressing him in the Scottish manner by the name of his property, "to the gallantry of your brave boy, Ronald, but for whose exertions I should at this moment have been sleeping at the bottom of the Linn at Corrie-avon. I have deemed it incumbent upon me to visit Lochisla, to return my earnest thanks personally for the signal service he has rendered to me, and I regret that

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the terms on which you—on which we have lived, render, in your estimation, my visit rather an honour than a pleasure."

A shade crossed the brow of the Highlander, but on hearing the particulars, he congratulated Sir Allan on his escape in a distant and polite manner, while the twinkle of his bright eyes showed how much satisfaction he enjoyed at the brave conduct of his son. While Sir Allan was relating the story, Mr. Stuart placed near him a large silver liqueur frame, containing six cut-glass bottles, the variously-coloured contents of which sparkled behind their silver labels.

"Come, Sir Allan, fill your glass, and drink to my boy's health: one does not experience so narrow an escape often, now-a-days at least. Come, sir, fill your glass,—there is sherry, brandy, port, and the purer dew of the hills; choose which you please."

"You Stuarts of Lochisla have long borne a name for hospitality, but it is rather early to taste strong waters,—'tis not meridian yet."

"Our hospitality was greater in the olden time than it is now; but it is not often that this old hall has within it one of the Lisles of the Inch, and you must positively drink with me," answered his host, compelling him to fill his glass from the decanter of purple port.

"Our visits have been fewer, and less friendly, than I trust they will be for the future. Your health, Lochisla," he added, sipping his wine. "'Tis sixty years and more, I think, since my father came up the Strath with his followers, when—"

"We will not talk of these matters, Sir Allan," exclaimed Stuart, on whose features was gathering a stern expression, which Sir Allan saw not, as he sat with his face to a window and looked through his glass with one eye closed, watching a crumb of the bee's-wing floating on the bright liquor. "They are the last I would wish to think of when you are my guest."

"Pardon me, I had no wish to offend; we have ever been as strangers to each other, although our acres march. I have had every desire to live on amicable terms with you, Mr. Stuart; but you have ever been prejudiced against me, and truly without a cause."

"I am one of the few who inherit the feelings of a bygone age. But, Sir Allan Lisle, let us not, I entreat you, refer to the past," coldly replied the old Highlander, to whom two parts of his guest's last speech were displeasing. The recurrence to the past terms on which they had lived, brought to his mind more than one case of litigation in which Sir Allan had come off victorious; the other was being addressed as *Mr. Stuart*, a title by which he was never known among his own people. The polite and affable manner of his visitor had tended to diminish his prejudices during the last five minutes, but Sir Allan's blundering observations recalled to the mind of the old *duinhe-wassal* the bitter feelings which he inherited from his father, and his high forehead became flushed and contracted.

"It appears very unaccountable," said he, after the uncomfortable pause which had ensued, "that my son has never, during the past days, mentioned the circumstance of the happy manner in which he drew you from the Corrie-avon."

"To that," replied the other laughing, "a story is appended, a very romantic one indeed, part of which I suppressed in my relation; nothing less, in fact, than a love affair, to which, as I have conceived a friendship for the brave boy to whom I owe a life, I drink every suc-

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cess" (draining his glass); "but this must be treated of more gravely at a future interview."

"Sir Allan, I understand you not; but if Ronald has formed any attachment in this neighbourhood, he must learn to forget it, as he will soon leave Lochisla. Some cottage girl, I suppose; these attachments are common enough among the mountains."

"You mistake me; the young lady is one every way his equal, and they have known each other from their childhood. But I will leave the hero to tell his own tale, which will sound better from the lips of a handsome Highland youth, than those of a plain grey-haired old fellow, like myself."

"I like your frankness," said Stuart, softened by the praise bestowed on his son by his old adversary, whose hand he shook, "and will requite it, Sir Allan. When Ronald comes down the glen, I will talk with him over this matter, which I confess troubles me a little at heart, as I never supposed he would have kept an attachment of his secret from me, his only parent now, and one that has loved him so dearly as I have done. But I must be gentle with him, as he is about to leave me soon, poor boy."

"Ah! for the army,—so I have heard: our boys will follow nothing else now-a-days. I fear my own springald, Lewis, is casting wistful thoughts that way. But should you wish it, I may do much in Ronald's favour: I have some little interest with those in power in London, and—"

"I thank you, but it needs not to be so. Huntly has promised me that Ronald shall not be forgotten when a vacancy occurs in the 'Gordon Highlanders,' a regiment raised among his own people and kindred; and the Marquis, whose interest is great with the Duke of York, will not forget his word—his pledged word—to a Highland gentleman."

On Sir Allan's departure, Stuart, from one of the hall windows, watched his retiring figure as he rode rapidly down the glen, and disappeared among the birchen foliage which overhung and shrouded the winding pathway. A sour smile curled his lip; he felt old prejudices rising strongly in his breast, and he turned his eye on the faded portrait of his father, and thought of the time when he had sat as a little child upon his knee, and heard the family of Lisle mentioned with all the bitterness of Highland rancour, and been told a thousand times of the days when Colonel Lisle had carried fire and sword through all Lochisla, besieging the little tower for days, until its inmates were perishing for want. In the tide of feeling which these reflections called forth, the late amiable interview was forgotten; and he only remembered Sir Allan as the foe of his race, and the victor in many a keenly contested case in the Parliament House, the place where the Court of Session sit at Edinburgh.

A bustle in the narrow staircase recalled him to himself: the door was thrown open, and Ronald entered, gun in hand, from the hill, flushed and excited with the nature of the sport. Two tall Highlanders strode behind, bearing on their shoulders a stout pole, from which was suspended by the heels a gigantic deer, whose branching antlers trailed on the floor, which was sprinkled with spots of blood falling from its dilated nostrils and a death-wound in its neck, which had been gashed across by the *skene-dhu* of a Highlander. A number of red-eyed dogs accompanied them, displaying in their forms the long and muscular limbs, voluminous chest, and rough wiry coat of the old Scottish hound,

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—a noble animal, once common in the Lowlands, but now to be found only in the north, where the deer wander free over immense stretches of waste moorland or forest, as they did of old.

"A brave beast he is," said Ronald, exultingly, as he cast aside his bonnet and gun. "At the head of the loch I fired, and wounded him here in the neck: we traced him by the blood for two miles down the Isla, where he flew through thicket and brake with the speed of an arrow; but the gallant dogs Odin and Carrill fastened upon him, and drew him down when about to take the water, near the marchstone of the Lisles. 'Twas luckily done: had he once gained the grounds of Inchavon, our prize would have been lost."

"Ronald," replied his father, coldly, "we will hear all this matter afterwards." Then turning to the gillies, "Dugald Stuart, and you Alpin Oig," said he, "carry away this quarry to the housekeeper, and desire her to fill your queghs for you. I have had a visit from Sir Allan Lisle," resumed Stuart, when the Highlanders had obeyed his order and retired. "Hah! you change countenance already: this has been a mysterious matter. He has been here to return thanks for your pulling him out of Isla, where he was nearly drowned, poor man, a day or two since,—a circumstance which you seem to have thought too worthless to mention to me. But there is another matter, on which I might at least have been consulted," he added, watching steadily the changes in the countenance of the young man, whose heart fluttered with excitement. "You have formed an attachment to some girl in the neighbourhood, which has reached the ears of this Allan Lisle, although it never came to mine, and the intercourse has continued for years, although I have been ignorant of it. Ronald, my boy, who is the girl? As your father, I have at least a right to inquire her name and family."

"Do pray excuse me," faltered the other, playing nervously with his bonnet; "I am too much embarrassed at present to reply,—some other time. Ah! your anger would but increase, I fear, were you to know."

"It does increase! Surely she is not a daughter of that grim churl Corrieoich, up the glen yonder? I have seen his tawdry kimmers at the county ball. I can scarcely think this flame of yours is a child of his. You remember the squabble I had with him about firing on his people, who were dragging the loch with nets under the very tower windows. By Heaven! is she a daughter of his?" cried his father, in the loud and imperative tone so natural to a Highlander. "Answer me, I command you, Ronald Stuart!"

"She is not, I pledge you my word," replied the young man gently.

"Ronald!" exclaimed the old gentleman, a dark flush gathering on his cheek, "she must be some mean and contemptible object, otherwise you would not shrink from the mention of her name, was it gentle and noble, in this coward way."

"Coward I never was," replied Ronald, bitterly. "I may shrink before my own father, when I would scorn to quail before the angry eye of any other man who lives or breathes. Nor do I blush to own the name of—of this lady. She is Alice, the daughter of Sir Allan Lisle, of Inchavon. Ah, sir! I fear I have applied a match to a mine; but I must await the explosion."

Ronald had indeed lighted a mine. A terrible expression flashed in the eyes of the old Highlander, and gathered upon his formidable brow.

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"Ronald! Ronald; for this duplicity I was unprepared," he exclaimed in emphatic Gaelic, with a tone of the bitterest reproach. "Have you dared to address yourself to a daughter of that man? Look up, degenerate boy!" he added, grasping Ronald's arm with fierce energy, while he spoke with stern distinctness. "Look upon the portrait of old Ian Mhor, your brave grandsire, and imagine what he would have thought of this. The Lisles of Inchavon! *Dhia gledh sinn!* I have not forgotten their last hostile attempt sixty-five years since, in 1746, when Colonel Lisle, the father of this Sir Allan, besieged our tower with his whole battalion. I was a mere infant then; but I well remember how the muskets of the fusiliers flashed daily and nightly from rock and copse-wood, and from the dark loopholes of the tower, where the brave retainers of Lochisla defended my father's stronghold with the desperate courage of outlawed and ruined men,—ruined and outlawed in a noble cause! These days of death and siege I have not forgotten, nor the pale cheek of the mother at whose breast I hung seeking nourishment, while she was perishing for want of food. Nor have I forgotten the gallows-tree—God be gracious unto me!—raised by the insolent soldiery on the brae-head to hang our people when they surrendered; and, had they ever yielded, they would have swung every man of them, and have been food for the raven and hoodiecraw. And this paternal tower would have been now ruined and roofless, forming a lair for the fox and the owl, but for the friendship of our kinsman Seafield, who wrung a respite and reprieve from the unwilling hand of the merciless German duke.

"Oh, Ronald Stuart! remember these things, and recall some traces of the spirit of Ian Mhor, whose name and blood you inherit. He was a stern old man, and a proud one, possessing the spirit of the days that are gone,—days when the bold son of the hills redressed his wrongs with his own right hand, and held his lands, not by possession of a sheepskin, but by the broad blade of his good claymore."

He paused a moment, passed his hand across his glowing brow, and thus continued in a tone of sterner import, and more high-flown Gaelic.

"Listen to me, O Ronald! Hearken to a father who has loved, and watched, and tended you as never father did a son. Think no more of Inchavon's daughter! Promise me to spurn her from your remembrance, or never more shall you find a home in the dwelling-place of our fathers: you shall be as a stranger to my heart, and your name be known in Lochisla no more. I will cast you off as a withered branch, and leave our ancient patrimony to the hereditary chieftain of our race. Pledge me your word, or, Ronald, I pronounce you for ever lost!"

During this long and energetic harangue, which was delivered in the sonorous voice which Mr. Stuart always assumed with his Gaelic, various had been the contending emotions in the bosom of Ronald. Love and pride, indignation and filial respect, agitated him by turns; and when his father ceased, he took up his bonnet with an air of pride and grief.

"Sir—sir—O my father!" said he, while his pale lip quivered, and a tear glittered in his dark eye, "you will be spared any further trouble on my account. I will go; leave Lochisla to the Stuarts of Appin, or whom you may please. I will seek my fortune elsewhere, and show you truly that 'a brave man makes every soil his country.'"

As he turned to leave the apartment, the stern aspect of his father's features relaxed, and he surveyed him with a wistful look.

"Stay, Ronald," he exclaimed; "I have been hasty. You would not desert me thus in my old age, and leave me with anger on your brow? Let not our pride overcome our natural affection. I will speak of this matter again, and ——"

Here he was interrupted by Donald Iverach, who entered respectfully, bonnet in hand, bearing two long official-looking letters, which he handed to Mr. Stuart, who started on perceiving "*On his Majesty's service*" (an unusual notice to him) printed on the upper corner of each.

"Hoigh!" said the piper, "your honour's clory disna get twa sic muckle letters ilka day. The auld doited cailloch tat keeps the post-house down at the clachan of Strathfillan, sent a gilly trotting up the water-side wi' them, as fast as his houghs could pring him."

Their contents became speedily known. The first was a letter from the Horse Guards, informing Mr. Stuart that his son was appointed to an ensigncy in the 92nd regiment, or Gordon Highlanders, commanded by the Marquis of Huntly. The second was to Ronald himself, signed by the adjutant-general, directing him with all speed to join a detachment which was shortly to leave the depôt in the Castle of Edinburgh for the seat of war.

Pride and pleasure at the new and varied prospect before him were the first emotions of Ronald's mind; sorrow and regret at thoughts of parting so suddenly, perhaps for ever, from all that was dear to him, succeeded them.

"Hoigh! hui-uigh!" cried old Iverach, capering with Highland agility on hearing the letters read. "Hui-uigh!" he exclaimed, making the weapons clatter on the wall with his wild and startling shout, while he tossed his bonnet up to the vaulted roof; "and so braw Maister Ronald is going to the clorious wars, to shoot the French loons like the muircocks o' Strathisla, or the bonnie red roes o' Benmore! Hoigh! Got tam! auld Iverach's son sall gang too, and follow the laird's, as my ain father and mony a braw shentleman did auld Sir Ian Mhor to the muster o' Glenfinan. And when promotion is in the way, braw Maister Ronald will no forget puir Evan Iverach, the son of his faither's piper, that follows him for love to the far-awa' land. And when the pipers blaw the onset, neither o' them will forget the bonnie banks of Lochisla, and the true hearts they have left behind them there. And when the onset is nigh, let them shout the war-cry of their race: my prave prothers cried it on the ramparts of Ticonderago,* where the auld plack watch were mown doon like grass, in a land far peyond the isles, where the sun sets in the west."

As this enthusiastic retainer left the apartment to communicate the news to the rest of the household, old Mr. Stuart turned to gaze on his son.

The arrival of these letters had caused a vast change in their feelings within the last five minutes; all traces of discord had vanished, and the softest feelings of our nature remained behind.

* In that sanguinary affair, the 42nd Highlanders, or old Black Watch, lost 43 officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, and had 603 privates killed and wounded; and "to many a heart and home in the Highlands did this disastrous though glorious intelligence bring desolation and mourning."

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CHAPTER IV.

THE DEPARTURE.

"Farewell, farewell, a last adieu!
Adieu, ye hills and dales so sweet;
Adieu, ye gurgling rills, for you
And I again may never meet!
Sweet lovely scene, with charms replete!
Backward my longing eyes I turn,
Leave your stupendous rocks with woe,
To yonder cloud-capped town I go,
Ah! never to return."

Colin Maclaurin.

SORROW for the sudden departure of Ronald was the prevailing sentiment in the tower of Lochisla, which old Janet the housekeeper caused to re-echo with her ceaseless lamentations, poured forth either in broken broad Scotch, or in her more poetical and descriptive Gaelic, for the going forth of the bold boy whom she had watched over and nursed from childhood with the tenderness of a mother.

His father felt deeply the pang of parting with the only child that death had left him; but he pent his feelings within his own proud bosom, and showed them but little. He said nothing more of Alice Lisle, unwilling to sour the few remaining hours they had to spend together by harsh injunctions or disagreeable topics, deeming that Ronald, in the busy scenes which were before him in his military career, would be taught to forget the boyish attachment of his early days. It is thus that old men ever reckon, forgetting that the first impressions which the young heart receives are ever the strongest and most lasting.

He directed with cool firmness the arrangements for his son's early departure; and save now and then a quivering of the lip or a deep sigh, no other emotion was visible. He felt keenly, nor would he ever have parted with Ronald, notwithstanding the eagerness of the youth to join the army, but for the entanglement of his private affairs, which rendered it absolutely necessary that his son should be independent of his shattered patrimony, and the proud and martial disposition of both their minds made arms the only profession to be chosen.

It was close upon the time of his departure ere Ronald could make an arrangement to obtain an interview with Alice Lisle. He despatched by Evan, the son of Iverach, a note to Alice, requesting her to meet and bid him adieu, in the lawn in front of Inchavon-house, on the evening of the second day, referring her to the bearer for a recapitulation of the events which had taken place.

The young Highlander, who was to accompany Ronald to the regiment as a servant and follower, was as shrewd and acute as a love-messenger required to be, and succeeded, after considerable trouble and delay, in delivering the billet into the fair hands of the young lady herself, who, although she neither shrieked or fainted, nor expired altogether, like a heroine of romance, was nevertheless overwhelmed with the intelligence, which Evan related to her as gently as he could; and after promising to attend to the note without fail, she retired to her own chamber, and gave way to the deepest anguish.

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At last arrived the important day which was to behold Ronald launched from his peaceful Highland home into the stormy scenes of a life which was new to him. Evan Iverach had been sent off in the morning with the baggage to the hamlet of Strathisla, where the stage-coach for Perth was to take up his young master.

Sorrowful indeed was the parting between the old piper and his son Evan Bean (*i. e.* fair-haired Evan), and they were but little comforted by the assurance of the old crone Janet, who desired them to "greet weel," as their weird was read, and they would never meet mair."

Ronald was seated with his father at breakfast in the hall or dining-room of the tower. The table was covered with viands of every kind, exhibiting all the profuseness of a true Scottish breakfast,—tea, coffee, cold venison, cheese, oaten bannocks, &c. &c. &c., and a large silver-mouthed bottle, containing most potent usquebaugh, distilled for the laird's own use by Alpin Oig Stuart in one of the dark and dangerous chasms on the banks of the Isla, a spot unknown to the exciseman, a personage much dreaded and abhorred in all Highland districts.

The old cailloch, Janet, was in attendance, weeping and muttering to herself. Iverach was without the tower, making the yard ring to the spirit-stirring notes of—

> "We'll awa to Shirramuir,
> An' haud the whigs in order;"

and he strode to and fro, blowing furiously, as if to keep up the failing spirit of his tough old heart.

Mr. Stuart said little, but took his morning meal as usual. Now and then he bit his nether lip, his eye glistened, and his brow was knit, to disguise the painful emotions that filled his heart.

Ronald ate but little, and sat totally silent, gazing with swimming eyes, while his heart swelled almost to bursting, on the lofty hills and dark pine woods, which, perchance, he might never more behold; and the sad certainty that slowly passing years would elapse ere he again stood by his paternal hearth, or beheld his father's face,—if, indeed, he was ever to behold it again,—raised within him emotions of the deepest sadness.

"Alas!" thought he, "how many years may roll away before I again look on all I have loved so long; and what dismal changes may not have taken place in that time!"

"Hui-uigh! Ochon—ochanari!" cried the old woman, unable to restrain herself longer, as she sunk upon a settle in the recess of the hall window. "He is going forth to the far awa land of the stranger, where the hoodiecraw and fox pyke the banes of the dead brave; but he winna return to us, as the eagle's brood return to their eyrie among the black cliffs o' bonnie Craigonan."

"He shall! old woman. What mean you by these disheartening observations in so sad an hour as this?" said the old gentleman sternly, roused by that prophetic tone which never falls without effect on the ear of a Scottish Highlander.

"Dinna speak sae to me, laird. God sain me! I read that in his bonnie black een which tells me that they shall never again look on mine."

"Hoigh! prutt, trutt," said Iverach, whom her cry had summoned to the spot, "the auld teevil of a cailloch will pe casting doon Maister Ronald's heart when it should pe at the stoutest. Huisht, Janet, and no be bedevilling us with visions and glaumorie just the noo."

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"Donald Iverach, I tell you he shall never more behold those whom he looks on this day: I tell you so, and I never spoke in vain," cried the old sibyl in Gaelic with a shrill voice. "When the brave sons of my bosom perished with their leader at Corunna, did I not know of their fall the hour it happened? The secret feeling, which a tongue cannot describe, informed me that they were no more. Yes; I heard the wild wind howl their death-song, as it swept down the pass of Craigonan, and I viewed their shapeless spirits floating in the black mist that clung round the tower of Lochisla on the night the field of Corunna was stricken, for many were the men of our race who perished there: the dead-bell sung to me the live-long night, and our caillochs and maidens were sighing and sad,—but I alone knew why."

"Peace! bird of ill omen," replied the piper in the same language, overawed by the force of her words.—"*Dhia gledh sinn!* will you break the proud spirit of a *duinhe-wassal* of the house of Lochisla, when about to gird the claymore and leave the roof-tree of his fathers?"

"Come, come; we have had enough of this," said Mr. Stuart. "Retire, Janet, and do not by your unseemly grief disturb the last hours that my son and I shall spend together."

"A wreath, and 'tis not for nought, is coming across my auld een," she replied, pressing her withered hands upon her wrinkled brow. "Sorrow and woe are before us all. I have seen it in many a dark dream at midnicht, and heard it in the croak of the nicht-bird, as it screamed from its eyrie in Coirnan-Taischatrin,* where the wee men and women dance their rings in the bonnie moonlicht. Greet and be woefu', my braw bairn, for we shall never behold ye mair. Ochon—ochon!" and pressing Ronald to her breast, this faithful old dependant rushed from the hall.

"Grief has distracted the poor old creature," said Mr. Stuart, making a strong effort to control the emotions which swelled his own bosom; while Ronald no longer concealed his, but covering his face with his hands, wept freely, and the piper began to blubber and sob in company.

"Hoigh! oigh! Got tam; it's joost naething but fairies' spells and glaumorie that's ever and aye in auld Janet's mouth. She craiks and croaks like the howlets in the auld chapel-isle, till it's gruesome to hear her. But dinna mind her, Maister Ronald; I'll blaw up the bags, and cheer your heart wi' the 'gathering' on the bonnie *piob mhor*." The piper retired to the yard, where the cotters and many a shepherd from the adjacent hills were assembled to behold Ronald depart, and bid him farewell.

Ronald's father, the good old man, although his heart was wrung and oppressed by the dismal forebodings of his retainer, did all that he possibly could to raise the drooping spirits of his son, by holding out hopes of quick promotion and a speedy return home; but Ronald wept like a youth as he was, and answered only by his tears.

"Oh, Ronald, my boy!" groaned the old man, "it is in an hour such as this that I most feel the loss of her whose fair head has long, long been under the grassy turf which covers her fair-haired little ones in the old churchyard yonder. The sun is now shining through the window of the ruined chapel, and I see the pine which marks their graves tossing its branches in the light." He looked fixedly across the

* The cave of the seers.

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loch at the islet, the grassy surface of which was almost covered with grey tombstones, beneath which slept the retainers of his ancestors, who themselves rested among the Gothic ruins of the little edifice, which their piety had endowed and founded to St. John, the patron saint of Perth.

The day sped fast away, and the hour came in which Ronald was compelled to depart, if he would be in time for the Perth stage, which passed through Strathisla. His father accompanied him to the gate of the tower, where he embraced and blessed him. He then turned to depart, after shaking the hard hand of many an honest mountaineer.

"May Got's plessing and all goot attend ye! Maister Ronald," blubbered old Iverach, who was with difficulty prevented from piping before him down the glen; "and dinna forget to befriend poor Evan Bean, that follows ye for love."

A sorrowful farewell in emphatic Gaelic was muttered through the court as Ronald, breaking from among them, rushed down the steep descent, as if anxious to end the painful scene. His father gazed wistfully after, as if his very soul seemed to follow his steps. Ronald looked back but once, and then dashed on as fast as his strength could carry him; but that look he never, never forgot.

The old man had reverently taken off his hat, allowing his silver hair to stream in the wind, and with eyes upturned to heaven was fervently ejaculating—"Oh, God! that hearest me, be a father unto my poor boy, and protect him in the hour of danger!"

It was the last time that Ronald beheld the face of his father, and deeply was the memory of its expression impressed upon his heart. Not daring again to turn his head, he hurried along the mountain-path, until he came to a turn of the glen which would hide the much-loved spot for ever. Here he turned and looked back: his father was no longer visible, but there stood the well-known tower rising above the rich copse-land, with the grey smoke from its huge kitchen-chimney curling over the battlements in the evening wind, which brought to his ear the wail of Iverach's bagpipe. The smooth surace of the loch shone with purple and gold in the light of the setting sun, the rays of which fell obliquely as its flaming orb appeared to rest on the huge dark mountains of the western Highlands.

"Ah! never shall I behold a scene like this in the land to which I go," thought Ronald, as he cast one eager glance over it all; and then, entering the deep rocky gorge, through which the road wound, hurried towards the romantic hamlet of Strathisla, the green mossy roofs and curling smoke of which he saw through the tufts of birch and pine a short distance before him.

It was dusk before he reached the cluster of primitive cottages, at the door of one of which, dignified by the name of "the coach-office," stood Evan with the baggage, impatiently awaiting the appearance of his master, as the time for the arrival of the coach was close at hand. Telling him hastily that he would meet the vehicle on the road near Inchavon-park, he passed forward to keep his promise to Alice. A few minutes' walk brought him to the boundary-wall of Sir Allan's property; vaulting lightly over, he found himself among the thickets of shrubs which were planted here and there about the smooth grassy lawn, in the centre of which appeared Inchavon-house, a handsome modern structure; the lofty walls and portico of fine Corinthian columns, surmounted by a small dome, all shone in the light of the

summer moon, by which he saw the glimmer of a white dress advancing hastily towards him.

At that instant the sound of the coach, as it came rattling and rumbling down a neighbouring hill, struck his ear, and his heart died within him, as he knew it would be there almost immediately.

"Alice!" he exclaimed, as he threw one arm passionately around her.

"Ronald, O Ronald!" was all the weeping girl could articulate, as she clung to him tremblingly.

"Remember me when I am gone! Love me as you do now when I shall be far, far away from you, Alice!"

"Ah, how could I ever forget you!"

At that moment the unwelcome vehicle drew up on the road.

"Stuart—Ronald, my old comrade," cried the frank though faltering voice of Lewis Lisle, who appeared at that moment; "give me your hand, my boy. You surely would not go without seeing me?"

Ronald pressed the hand of Lewis, who threw over his neck a chain, at which hung a miniature of his sister.

"Alas!" muttered Ronald, "I have nothing to give as a keepsake in return! Ay, this ring,—'tis a very old one, but it was my mother's; wear it for my sake, Alice." To kiss her pale cheek, place her in the arms of Lewis, to cross the park and leap the wall, were to the young Highlander the work of a moment,—and he vanished from their side.

"Come along, sir! We canna be keepit here the haill nicht," bawled the driver crossly as Ronald appeared upon the road, where the white steam was curling from the four panting horses in the moonlight, which revealed Evan, seated with the goods and chattels of himself and master among the muffled-up passengers who loaded the coach-top.

"Inside, sir?" said the guard from behind the shawl which muffled his weather-beaten face as he held open the door. Ronald, scarcely knowing what he did, stepped in, and the door closed with a bang, which made the driver rock on his seat. "A' richt, Jamie; drive on!" cried the guard, vaulting into the dickey; and in a few minutes more the noise of wheels and hoofs had died away from the ears of poor Alice and her brother, who listened with beating hearts to the retiring sound.

CHAPTER V.

EDINBURGH CASTLE.

"But tender thoughts maun now be hushed,
When danger calls, I must obey;
The transport waits us on the coast,
And the morn I will be far away." *Tannahill.*

THE young Highlander, who had never beheld a larger city than Perth, was greatly struck with the splendid and picturesque appearance of Edinburgh. The long lines of densely-crowded streets, the antique and lofty houses, the spires, the towers, the enormous bridges spanning deep ravines, the long dark alleys, crooks, nooks, and corners of the old town, with its commanding castle; and then the *new*, with its innumerable and splendid shops, filled with rich and costly stuffs, the smoke, noise, and confusion of the great thoroughfares and promenades

contrasted with the sombre and gloomy grandeur of the Canongate and Holyrood, were all strange sights to one who from infancy had been accustomed to "the eagle and the rock, the mountain and the cataract, the blue-bell, the heather, and the long yellow broom, the Highland pipe, the hill-climbing warrior, and the humbler shepherd in the garb of old Gaul."

From the castle he viewed with surprise and delight the vast amphitheatre which surrounds the city. To the westward Corstorphine, covered to the summit with the richest foliage, Craiglockart, Blackford, the ridges of Braid and Pentland, the Calton, the craigs of Salisbury and Arthur's Seat, encircling the city on all sides except the north, where the noble Frith of Forth,—the Bodoria of the Romans,—the most beautiful stream in Scotland, perhaps in Britain, wound along the yellow sands.

Far beyond were seen the Lomonds of Fife, the capes of Crail and Elie, the broad bays and indentures of the German Ocean, and the islets of the Forth, the banks of which are studded with villages, castles, churches, and rich woodland. As he entered the fortress, he was particularly struck with the gloomy and aged appearance of its embattled buildings and lofty frowning batteries, where the black cannon peeped grimly through antique embrasures. It was a place particularly interesting to Ronald (as it is to every true Scotsman), who thought of the prominent part it bore in the annals of his country,—of the many sieges it had sustained, and the many celebrated persons who had lived and died within the walls, which held the crown and insignia of a race whose name and power had passed away from the land they had ruled and loved so long.

Kilted sentinels, wearing the plumed bonnet, tasselled *sporan* or purse, and the dark tartan, striped with yellow, of the Gordon Highlanders, appeared at the different bastions as he passed the drawbridge, entered through many a strong gate studded with iron, and the black old arch where the two portcullises of massive metal hang suspended.

Ronald, for the first time since he left home, found himself confounded and abashed when he was received by the haughty staff-officer in the cold and stiff manner which these gentlemen assume to regimental officers. Here he *reported* himself, as the phrase is, and presented the letters of the adjutant-general. It was in a gloomy apartment of the old palace, and the very place in which the once beautiful Mary of Guise breathed her last. Its furniture consisted of two chairs and a hardwood table covered with books, army-lists, papers and dockets of letters: boards of general orders, a couple of swords, and forage-caps hung upon the wall. A drum stood in one corner, and an unseemly cast-iron coal-box bearing the mystic letters "B. O." stood in another. A decanter of port and a wine-glass, which appeared on the mantel-shelf, showed that the occupant of the office knew the secret of making himself comfortable.

Considerably damped in spirit, by the dry and unsoldierlike reception he had experienced, Ronald next sought the quarters of the officer who commanded the detachment of his own regiment. On quitting the citadel, he passed the place where the French prisoners of war were confined. It was a small piece of ground, enclosed by a strong palisado, over which the poor fellows displayed for sale those ornaments and toys which the ingenuity of their nation enabled them to make. Little ships, toothpicks, bodkins, dominoes, boxes, &c. were manu-

factured by them from the bones of their scanty allowance of ration meat, and offered for sale to the soldiers of the garrison, or visitors from the city who chanced to pass the place of their confinement.

They appeared to be generally very merry, and were dressed in the peculiar uniform of the prison; but here and there might be observed an officer, who, having broke his parole of honour, was now degraded by being placed among the rank and file. Ronald was but a young soldier, and consequently pitied them; he thought of what his own feelings would be were he a prisoner in a foreign land, with the bayonets of guards glittering at every turn; but there seemed to be none there who yearned for home or hearts they had left behind them, save one; and of him we will speak hereafter. The reception Ronald met with from the officers of his own corps tended much to revive his drooping spirits, which were for some time sadly depressed by the remembrance of Lochisla, and the affectionate friends he had left behind him there.

Among the officers were young men who, like himself, had recently left their homes in the distant north, and a unison of feeling existed in their minds; but, generally, they were merry, thoughtless fellows, and the vivacity of their conversation, the frolics in which they were ever engaged, and the bustle of the garrison, were capital antidotes against care. But the tear often started to the eye of Stuart as he beheld the far-off peak of Ben Lomond, fifty miles distant from the window of his room,—his rank as a subaltern entitling him only to one, and he thought of the romantic hills of Perthshire, or of the lonely hearth where his grey-haired sire mourned for his absence. But little time was allowed him to muse thus. Parades in the castle, the promenades, theatres, the gay blaze of ball-rooms in the city, crowded with beautiful and fashionable girls and glittering uniforms, left him little time for reflection; and the day of embarkation for the Peninsula, the seat of war, to which all men's thoughts—and women's too—were turned, insensibly drew nigh.

Evan Iverach had been enlisted in his master's company, and under the hands of a regimental tailor, and the tuition of the drill sergeant, was rapidly becoming a smart soldier, while he still remained an attached servant to his master.

The latter, soon after his arrival in the capital, had visited his father's agent, Mr. Æneas Macquirk, a writer to the signet, who had long transacted the business and fleeced the pocket of the old laird in the most approved legal manner. This worthy, having lately procured the old gentleman's signature to a document which was ultimately to be his ruin, was therefore disposed to treat Ronald drily enough, having made the most of his father; and he would never have been invited to the snug front-doorhouse, with the carpeted staircase, comfortable dining and airy drawing-room in the new town, but for the vanity of Mrs. and the Misses Macquirk, who thought that the rich uniform of the young officer as a visitor gave their house a gay and fashionable air.

Quite the reverse of the good old "clerks to the signet" who once dwelt in the dark closes of the old city, Macquirk was one of the many contemptible fellows whose only talent is chicanery, and who fatten and thrive on that unfortunate love of litigation which possesses the people of Scotland. Mean and servile to the rich, he was equally purse-proud and overbearing to the poor, to whom he was a savage and remorseless creditor. Many were the unfortunate citizens who cursed

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the hour in which they first knew this man, who feathered his nest by the law, better than ever his father had done by the honester trade of mending shoes in the West Bow.

Mrs. Macquirk was a vulgar-looking woman, most unbecomingly fat; her money had procured her a husband, and she was as proud as could be expected, considering that she had first seen the light in the low purlieus of the Kraimes, and now found herself mistress of one of the handsomest houses in Edinburgh.

The young ladies were more agreeable, being rather good-looking but very affected, having received all the accomplishments that it was in the power of their slighted and brow-beaten governess, the daughter of a good but unfortunate family, to impart to them. They gave parties, that Ronald might show off the uniform of the Gordon Highlanders, and played and sung to him in their best style; while he drew many comparisons between them and the Alice whose miniature he wore in his bosom, by which they lost immensely; and while listening to their confused foreign airs and songs, he thought how much sweeter and more musical were the tones of Alice Lisle, when she sung "The Birks of Invermay," or any other melody of the mountains, making his heart vibrate to her words. But even in the Castle of Edinburgh Ronald had recently made a friend, whose society, in spite of military and Highland gallantry, he preferred to that of the daughters of Macquirk.

Among the French captives within the stockade, he had frequently observed a young officer who remained apart from the rest, the deep dejection and abstraction of whose air gained him the readily-excited sympathy of the young Highlander. He was a tall, handsome, well-shaped young man, with regular features, dark eyes, and a heavy black moustache on his upper lip. He wore the uniform of Napoleon's famous Imperial Guards; but the once gay epaulette and lace were much worn and faded. He wore a long scarlet forage-cap, adorned with a band, a tassel falling over his right shoulder. The gold cross of the Legion of Honour dangling at his breast showed that he had seen service, and distinguished himself.

He had more than once observed the peculiar look with which Ronald Stuart had eyed him; and on one occasion, with the politeness of his nation, he gracefully touched his cap. The Scotsman bowed, and beckoned him to a retired part of the palisado.

"Can you speak our language, sir?" asked he.

"Oh, yes, Monsieur officier," replied the Frenchman; "I have learned it in the prison."

"I regret much to see you, an officer, placed here among the common rank and file. How has such an event come to pass? Can I in any way assist you?"

"Monsieur, I thank you; you are very good, but it is not possible," stammered the Frenchman in confusion, his sun-burned cheek reddening while he spoke. "*Croix Dieu!* yours are the first words of true kindness that I have heard since I left my own home, in our pleasant France. O, monsieur, I could almost weep! I am degraded among my fellow-soldiers, my *frères d'armes*. I have broken my parole of honour, and am placed among the private men; confined within this palisado by day, and these dark vaults by night,"—pointing to the ancient dungeons which lie along the south side of the rocks, and are the most antique part of the fortress. These gloomy places were the allotted quarters of the French prisoners in Edinburgh.

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"I have been placed here in consequence of a desperate attempt I made to escape from the depôt (Greenlaw* I think it is named), at the foot of these high mountains. I perceive you pity me, monsieur, and indeed I am very miserable."

"I dare swear the penance of captivity is great; but 'tis the fortune of war, and may be my own chance very soon."

"Ah, monsieur!" said the Frenchman, despondingly, "to me it is as death. But 'tis not the *mal du pays*, the home-sickness, so common among the Switzers and you Scots, that preys upon my heart. Did you know my story, and all that afflicts me, your surprise at the dejection in which I appear sunk would cease. I endure much misery here: our prison allowance is scant, my uniform is all gone to rags, and I have not wherewith to procure other clothing. We are debarred from many comforts—" The blood rose to the temples of the speaker, who suddenly ceased on perceiving that Ronald had drawn forth his purse. He could ill spare the money, but he pressed it upon the Frenchman, by whom, after much hesitation, the gift was accepted.

"It was not my intention to have excited your charity," said he; "but I take the purse as a gift from one brother soldier to another, and will share it among my poor comrades. Though our nations be at war, *frères d'armes* we all are, monsieur; and should it ever be in his power, by Heaven and St. Louis! Victor d'Estouville will requite your kindness. If by the fortune, or rather misfortune, of war, you ever become a prisoner in my native country, you will find that the memory of *la Garde Ecossaise* and your brave nation, which our old kings loved so long and well, and the sufferings of the fair *Marie*, are not yet forgotten in *la belle France*."

"I trust my destiny will never lead me to a captivity in France, or elsewhere. But keep a stout heart: the next cartel that brings an exchange of prisoners may set you free."

"*Mon Dieu!* I know not what may have happened at home before that comes to pass. Monsieur, you have become my friend, and have therefore a right to my confidence; my story shall be related to you as briefly as possible. My name is d'Estouville. I am descended from one of the best families in France, of which my ancestors were peers, and possessed large estates in the province of Normandy,—a name which finds an echo, methinks, in your sister kingdom. By the late revolution, in which my father lost his life, all our lands were swept from us, with the exception of a small cottage in the neighbourhood of Henriqueville, situated in the fertile valley where the thick woods and beautiful vineyards lie intermingled along the banks of the winding Seine; and to this spot my poor mother with her fatherless children retired. Ah, monsieur! 'twas a charming little place: methinks I see it now, the low-roofed cottage, with the vines and roses growing round its roof and chimneys, and in at the little lattices that glistened in the sunshine,—every green lane and clump of shadowy trees, and every silver rill around it.

"Living by our own industry, we were happy enough; my brother and myself increased in strength and manliness, as my sisters did in beauty; and the sweetness of my noble mother's temper, together with

* A village near Edinburgh, where barracks were constructed in 1810 for some thousands of French prisoners. The buildings are now quite deserted, and no trace remains of their former inhabitants, except a monument, with an appropriate inscription, erected by the proprietor of Valley-Field-mill over the remains of 300 French soldiers, interred in the most beautiful part of the grounds.

the quiet and unassuming tenour of our lives, rendered us the favourites of all the inhabitants of the valley of Lillebonne.

"Monsieur, I loved a fair girl in our neighbourhood, a near relation of my own,—Diane de Montmichel, a beautiful brunette, with dark hair and sparkling eyes. Oh! could we but see Diane now!

"*Mon Dieu!* The very day on which I was to have wedded her was fixed, and the future seemed full of every happiness; but the great Emperor wanted men to fight his battles, and by one conscription the whole youth of the valley of Lillebonne were drawn away. My brother and myself were among them. Ah, monsieur! Napoleon thinks not of the agony of French mothers, and the bitter tears that are wept for every conscription. Britain recruits her armies with thousands of free volunteers, who tread by their own free-will the path of honour. France—but we will not talk of this. Our poor peasant boys were torn from their cottages and vineyards, from the arms of their parents and friends; we felt our hearts swelling within us, but to resist was to die. O, monsieur! what must have been the thoughts of my high-minded mother when she beheld her sons—the sons of a noble peer of old France—drawn from her roof to carry the musket as private soldiers—"

"And Diane de Montmichel?"

"In a few months I found myself fighting the battles of the great Emperor as a soldier of his Imperial Guard, the flower of *la belle France*. In our first engagement with the enemy, my brave brother fell—poor Henri! But why should I regret him? He fell gaining fame for France, and died nobly with the eagle on his breast and the folds of the tricolour waving over him. Since then I have distinguished myself, was promoted, and received from the hand of Napoleon this gold cross, which had once hung on his own proud breast. I received it amidst the dead and the dying, on a field where the hot blood of brave men had been poured forth as water. From that moment I was more than ever his devoted soldier. He had kindled in my breast the fire of martial ambition, which softer love had caused to slumber. I now looked forward joyously to quick promotion, and my return to poor Diane and my mother's vine-covered cot in happy Lillebonne. But my hopes were doomed to be blasted. I was taken prisoner in an unlucky charge, and transmitted with some thousand more to this country.

"O, monsieur! not even the pledge of my most sacred honour as a gentleman and soldier could bind me while love and ambition filled my heart. I mourned the monotonous life of a military prisoner, and fled from the depôt at Greenlaw; but I was retaken a day after, and sent to this strong fortress, where for three long and weary years I have been confined among the common file. O, monsieur! Diane—my mother—my sisters! what sad changes may not have happened among them in that time!"

He covered his face for a moment with his hand to hide his emotion.

"Adieu, monsieur! Should we ever meet where it is in my power to return your kindness, you will find that I can be grateful, and remember that in his distress you regarded Victor d'Estouville, not as a Frenchman and an enemy, but as a brother *officier* under misfortunes."

He ceased, and bowing low, retired from the palisado to mingle among the prisoners.

Since his arrival in the capital, Ronald had received many letters

from home, but none from Alice Lisle; he was deterred from writing to her, fearing that his letters might fall into other hands than her own, and he grew sad as the day of embarkation drew near, and he heard not from the fair girl, whose little miniature afforded him a pleasing object for contemplation in his melancholy moods.

On the morning after the arrival of *the route*, Ronald was awakened from sleep about daybreak, by the sound of the bagpipe, which in his dreaming ear carried him home: he almost fancied himself at Lochisla, and that old Iverach was piping to the morning sun, when other sounds caused him to start. He sprang up, and looked from the lofty old window into the gloomy court of the castle. Ronald Macdonuil-dhu, the piper, was blowing forth the regimental gathering, the wild notes of which were startling the echoes of the ancient fortress, and rousing the soldiers, who were thronging forth in heavy marching order—as the military term is—completely accoutred.

"Come, Stuart, my boy, turn up!" cried Alister Macdonald, a brother ensign, who entered the room unceremoniously, "you will be late; we march in ten minutes, and then good-bye to the crowded ball-rooms and fair girls of Edinburgh."

"I had no idea the morning was so far advanced," replied Ronald, dressing himself as fast as possible. "There goes the roll of the drum now; why, they are falling in."

"The deuce! I must go, or our hot-headed commander, the major, may forget that I am a kinsman from the Isle of the Mist. This morning he is as cross as a bear with a sore head, and expends his ill-humour on the acting adjutant, who in turn expends his on the men. There is the sound of Black Ronald's pipe again; I must be off," and he left the apartment.

"Come, Evan, bustle about, and get me harnessed! Push this belt under my epaulette, bring me my sword and bonnet; be quick, will you?" cried Ronald to his follower, who, accoutred for the march with his heavy knapsack on his back, entered the room. "You will look after the baggage. Where are the trunks, and other *et cætera?*"

"A' on the road to Leith twa hoors syne."

"What, in the dark?"

"Ay, maister, just in the dark. Three muckle carts, piled like towers, wi' kists and wives an' weans on the tap, an' pans and camp-kettles jingling frae ilka neuk and corner,—an' unco like flitten' as ever I saw."

With Evan's assistance, his master was garbed and armed. On descending to the castle square, he found the detachment, to the number of three hundred men, formed in line, motionless and silent. Ronald was particularly struck with the martial and service-like appearance of the Highlanders, by the combination which their costume exhibits of the "garb of old Gaul" with the rich uniform of Great Britain. The plumed bonnets, drooping gracefully over the right shoulder, the dark tartan, the hairy purses, the glittering appointments, and long line of muscular bare knees, together with the gloomy and antique buildings of the fortress, formed a scene at once wild and picturesque; but Ronald had little time for surveying it.

There is something peculiarly gallant and warlike in the dashing appearance of our Highland soldiers, which brings to the mind the recollections of those days when the swords of our ancestors swept before them the martial legions of Rome—imperial Rome, whose arms had laid prostrate the powers of half a world—of the later deeds of

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Bannockburn, and many other battles—the remembrance of our ancient kings and regal independence—all "the stirring memory of a thousand years," raising a flush of proud and tumultuous feelings in the breast of every Scotsman, who beholds in these troops the brave representatives of his country; troops who, in every clime under the sun, have maintained untarnished her ancient glory and her name. So thought Ronald, and he was proud to consider himself one of them, as he drew his sword and took his place in the ranks.

The rattling bayonets were fixed, and flashed in the morning sun, as the muskets were shouldered and "sloped," the line broke into sections, and moving off to the stirring sound of the fife and drum, began to descend the steep and winding way to the gate of the fortress.

The idea of departing for foreign service had something elevating and exciting in it, which pleased the minds of all, but roused to the utmost the romantic spirit of Ronald Stuart, whose ear was pleased with the tread of the marching feet and sharp roll of the drums resounding in the hollow archway; as was his eye, with the waving feathers and glittering weapons of the head of the little column, as they descended the pathway towards the city.

As they passed through the latter towards Leith, the streets were almost empty, none being abroad at that early hour, save here and there, within the ancient royalty, an old city guardsman, armed with his Lochaber axe; but the head of many a drowsy citizen in his nightcap appeared at the windows, from which many an eye gazed with that interest which the embarkation of troops for the seat of war always called forth; for many were marching there who were doomed to leave their bones in the distant soil of the Frank or Spaniard. Many relatives and friends of the soldiers accompanied their march, and Ronald was witness of many a painful parting between those who might never meet again.

"O my bairn! my puir deluded bairn!" exclaimed an aged woman wildly, as she rushed into the ranks with her grey hairs falling over her face, and with streaming eyes, clasped a son round the neck; "O lang, lang will it be till I see ye again; and oh, when you are far awa frae bonnie Glencorse, wha will tend ye as your auld forsaken mither has dune? she that has toiled, and watched ower, and prayed for ye, since ye first saw the licht. O Archy, my doo, speak; let me hear your voice for the last time!"

"God be wi' ye, mither! O leave me! or my heart will burst in twa," sobbed the poor fellow, while some of his more thoughtless comrades endeavoured by jests and ill-timed merriment to raise his drooping spirits; and many a hearty but sorrowful "Gude bye," and "Fareweel," was interchanged on all sides as they passed along. The sun was high in the sky when they halted on the beach at Leith; and above a thick morning mist, which rested on the face of the water, Ronald saw the lofty taper spars and smart rigging of the large transport which lay out in the stream, with her white canvass hanging loose, and "blue peter" flying at the fore-mast head.

As boat after boat, with its freight of armed men, was pulled off towards the vessel, shouts loud and long arose from the sailors and idlers on the pier and quays; and stirring were the cheers in reply which arose from the boats and floated along the surface of the river, as the Highlanders waved their bonnets in farewell to those they left behind. Certainly, like many others, Ronald did not feel at his ease when on board the vessel, and he became confused with the tramp of

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feet, the bustle, the rattle of arms, the loud chant of the sailors weighing anchor, the clash of the windlass pals, the pulling, hauling, ordering, and swearing, on all sides,—sights and sounds to him alike new and wonderful. The smell of tar, grease, bilge-water, tobacco, and a hundred other disagreeable odours, assailed him, and he felt by anticipation the pleasures of sea-sickness.

As soon as the anchor swung suspended at the bow, the yards were braced sharp up, the canvass filled, and the ripple which arose at the bow announced the vessel under weigh. She slowly passed the light-house which terminates the old stone pier, and rounding the strong Martello tower, moved down the glassy waters of the broad and noble Forth.

The officers were grouped together on the poop, and their soldiers lined the side of the vessel, gazing on the city towering above the morning mist, which was rolling heavily and slowly along the bases of the hills in huge white volumes. The frowning and precipitous front of the bold craigs of Salisbury—the still greater elevation of Arthur's lofty cone—the black and venerable fortress—the tall spires and houses of the city—the romantic hills of Braid—the wooded summit of Corstorphine—and the undulating line of the gigantic Pentlands, were all objects which riveted their attention; and many a brave man was there whose heart swelled within him while he gazed, for the last time, perhaps, on the green mountains and ancient capital of Caledonia.

CHAPTER VI.

FOREIGN SERVICE.

"Who had followed, stout and stern,
Through the battle's rout and reel,
Storm of shot and hedge of steel,
The gallant grandson of Lochiel,
Valiant *Fassifern*." *Scott.*

A MONTH or two more found Ronald with his comrades, after being landed at Lisbon, pursuing their route through Portugal to join their regiment, then campaigning in Estremadura with the division of Sir Rowland Hill.

Everywhere the ravages of the ruthless French were visible as they marched onwards. At Santarem, Punhete, Abrantes, and many other places, they viewed with surprise and pity the pale features of the starving inhabitants, the fire-blackened walls, the roofless streets or utterly-deserted villages, from which everything had been carried off or given to destruction by the French in their retreat. Ancient churches and stately convents had been turned into stables, where cavalry horses and baggage-mules chewed their wretched forage of chopped straw, and reposed on the lettered stones, beneath which slept the proud cavaliers and brave Hidalgos of old Lusitania.

When they looked on these scenes of desolation, and considered the desecration of everything, whether sacred or profane, their hearts grew sick within them, and they thought of the happy isle which they had left behind, where such horrors are unknown—unknown to the mercantile citizens, who grudge so much the miserable pittance received by the poor soldier.

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In their route through these places, they were welcomed by no sign of merriment, no joyful cheering, from those whom they had come to free from the iron grasp of Buonaparte; they were greeted with no welcome save the sepulchral tolling of some cathedral or chapel bell—the waving of white kerchiefs or veils from the grated lattice of some convent which had escaped the ravagers, when their walls rung to the sound of the drum and war-pipe—the muttered benison of some old *Padre*, as he viewed with surprise the bare knees, the wild and martial garb, of the men of Albyn, and the gigantic proportions of the officer who commanded them. Major Campbell was a handsome Highlander, of a most muscular make and Herculean form. His dark hair was becoming grizzled, for he was nearly fifty years of age, and his nut-brown cheek had been tanned by the sun and storm in many a varied clime. From the strength of his arm and the length of his sword (a real Andrea Ferrara,* with the maker's name on the blade), he was a most uncomfortable antagonist at close quarters, as many of the French and others had found to their cost; but Campbell never drew his Andrea unless when he found himself pressed, but made use of a short oak stick furnished with a heavy knob at the end, which he had cut in one of the wild forests of Argyleshire, and always retained and carried with him, as a relic and memorial of his native mountains.

It was towards the end of a chilly day in the spring of 1812, that the major's detachment halted in the ancient city of Albuquerque, where they spent their first night in Spain. This old frontier town is situated in the slope of the Sierra de Montanches, a ridge of mountains in Estremadura. By a miracle, or little short of it, it had escaped better than other places the ravages of the French, who had left the roofs on all the houses, which were, however, gutted of everything of value. In general the outrages of Napoleon's troops were less flagrant in Spain than in Portugal, from a wish to conciliate the former, and render them, as of old, friends and allies. Owing to the eminence on which the city is situated, its streets are much cleaner than those of Spanish towns generally, where the thoroughfares are cleared of the mud and filth that encumber them by the rain, which in Albuquerque, when it falls heavily, sweeps everything down the causewayed slopes to the bed of the Guadiana, which flows past the foot of the city. An ancient castle, as old probably as the days of Roderick, "the last of the Goths," stands upon the summit of a rock above the town; and around its base are the streets, ill paved, dark, and narrow,—well fitted for Spanish deeds of assassination and robbery. By an order from the *alcalde*, the Highlanders were billeted upon different houses, and Ronald Stuart and Major Campbell were both quartered in the same mansion, the *patron* of which, Senor Narvaez Cifuentes (as he styled himself), kept a shop for retailing the country wine. Many goodly pigskins filled with it were ranged upon the rickety shelves of his store, from the ruinous rafters of which hung some thousands of tempting bunches of dried grapes, and many of these fell kindly down at Campbell's feet when the old house shook with his heavy tread.

The patron, in appearance, was not quite what one should wish a host to be, especially in a strange country. His stature was low, his face was so swarthy as to resemble that of a negro in darkness; his moustaches were thick, fierce, and black, mingling with the matted hair of his huge bullet-head. He wore a long stiletto (openly) in the

* These swords are often worn by the officers of our Highland corps, the old blades being polished and set in new regimental basket-hilts.

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yellow worsted sash which encircled his waist, and the haft of a knife appeared within the breast of his doublet, or sort of vest with sleeves, which was, like the rest of his attire, in a very dilapidated condition; and, altogether, the Senor Narvaez Cifuentes displayed more of the bravo or bandit, than the saint in his appearance.

He was, nevertheless, a rattling jolly sort of fellow, especially for a Spaniard; he sung songs and staves without number to entertain his guests, who scarcely comprehended a word of them; and to show his loyalty, emptied many a horn to the health of Ferdinand VII., to the freedom of Spain, and to the eternal confusion of the French, compelling, with rough and unceremonious hospitality, Stuart and the major to do so likewise, until they had well nigh each imbibed the contents of a pigskin,—the common vessel for containing wine in Spain, where neither bottles nor flasks are used, but the simple invention of a pigskin, sewn up with the hair inside, which, when full, looks not unlike the bag of the Scottish piper, from its black, bloated, and greasy appearance.

Almost reeling with the effects of their potations, they were shown by the patron to their chamber, where their bedding consisted only of a blanket and mattress.

"What the mischief is the meaning of this, Senor Patron, Mr. Narvaez, or what is your title?" stammered the major, holding the flickering candle over the miserable couch; "'tis all over blood. What does it mean? We *soldados* are not so fond of slaughter as to relish a bed of this sort." This strange exclamation recalled Ronald's wandering senses, and on surveying their humble pallet, he beheld it stained with blood, which, though hard and dry, appeared to have been recently shed, and in no small quantity.

"Campbell, here has been some foul work," said he, instinctively laying his hand on his basket-hilt. "Make the fellow explain."

"Holloa, Mr. Cifuentes; tell us all about it, or I'll beat the pipe-clay out of your tattered doublet, and that without parley," vociferated the inebriated major, flourishing his short cudgel over the head of their host.

"*Dios mio*, senors! Ha! ha! what a noise you make about a few red spots; 'tis French Malaga," replied the other, laughing heartily, as if something tickled his fancy exceedingly. "But I will tell you the tale as it happened, as you appear so anxious about it. The last time the French were in Albuquerque, I had four of their officers billeted upon me by our dog of an alcalde. They were merry and handsome young sparks of the chasseurs, and I plied them well with the contents of half-a-dozen pigskins, until they could scarcely stand, and then led them here for their repose; and they all four slept upon this very pallet. In the night-time I and two other comrades, guerillas of Don Salvador de Zagala's band, stole softly in upon them, and plunged our stilettos into their hearts;* they died easily, being overcome with wine and the fatigue of a long march, and our strokes were deadly and sure. Carrying off all their chattels, we hid for some days in the forest of Albuquerque until the enemy had retired, when I returned, and was surprised to find my *caza* but little the worse. The carrion, which we had tossed into the street in our flight, had been carried away, and buried by Dombrouski's corps with military honours.

"So now, senors, you see I am a true patriot,—a loyal Spaniard,

* This piece of cruelty is no fiction, but actually happened as related here.

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and that you have nothing to suspect me for. All Albuquerque knows the story of the four chasseurs, and praise me for the deed. I will turn up the mattress to hide the marks, and you will repose in all comfort upon it." As all this was related in Spanish, but little of it was understood by Ronald, who, however, comprehended enough to make him regard with detestation and horror the man who coolly confessed that he had slain four helpless fellow-beings in cold blood, and exulted in the narration of the deed with the feeling of one who had acted a most meritorious part. The satisfaction of the patriotic patron seemed considerably damped by the expression which he saw depicted in the features of his hearers.

"I do not believe you: this cannot be true," said they, at one and the same time.

"*Madre de Dios!* I call the mother of God to witness that it is. Why, senor, the men were only Frenchmen, and you would have taken their lives yourselves."

"In the open field, when equally armed; but we should not have stolen upon them in the night, and butchered them in their sleep, as you say you did. And you shall die for it, you base Spanish dog!" cried Ronald furiously, as he unsheathed his sword.

"Hold, Stuart, my lad!" cried the major, who was perfectly sobered by this time; "it is beneath a soldier and gentleman to draw on so vile a scoundrel as this: I will deal with him otherwise. Look ye, Senor Narvaez," said Campbell, turning to the Spaniard, who had started back at the sight of Ronald's glittering blade, and eyed them both with a savage scowl, while his hand grasped the hilt of his poniard. "You had better betake yourself again to your friends in the forest of Albuquerque, and get clear of the city by morning, or I may have interest enough with the corregidor or alcalde to have you hanged like a scarecrow by the neck. So retire now, fellow, at once, and leave us."

"*Demonios!*" cried he, grinding his teeth; "am I not master of my own house? *Carajo, senor*——" The rest was cut short by the summary mode of ejectment put in force by the major. Seizing him by the throat, he dragged him to the door, and in spite of all his struggles,—for the Spaniard, though a stout ruffian, was not a match for the gigantic Highlander,—hurled him to the lower landing-place of the old wooden stair, and tossing the mattress after him, shut and bolted the door.

"I can scarcely believe the tale to be true which this fellow has told us," observed Ronald, as they composed themselves to rest upon the hard boards, with no other covering than their gay regimentals.

"I entertain no doubt of its truth. He called to witness *one*, whom a Spaniard names only on most solemn occasions. But we must seek some sleep: 'tis two in the morning by my watch, and we march in three hours. The boards are confoundedly hard, and I am too sleepy to prick for a soft place. *Diavolo!* what a time we have wasted with that tattered vagabond! But good night, Stuart; we will talk this matter over on the march to-morrow."

Campbell stretched his bulky form on the boards, with his cudgel and long claymore beside him, and turning his face to the wall was soon in a deep slumber, as a certain noise proceeding from his nostrils indicated. But it was not so with the younger soldier, who courted in

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vain the influence of the drowsy god whose power had overwhelmed the senses of his comrade.

The fumes of the unusual quantity of wine which he had taken were mounting into Ronald's head, and he lay watching the pale light of the stars through the latticed windows. Frightful faces, which he traced in the stains on the discoloured wall, seemed to peer through the gloom upon him, and every rumbling sound that echoed through the old mansion caused him to start, gripe his sword and look about, for the vivid idea of the poor chasseurs who had been assassinated, in that very chamber, haunted him continually, causing him to shudder. When he thought, also, that he had spent the night in carousal with a murderous bravo, he resolved to be more circumspect in what company he would trust his person, in future, while in Spain.

From a sleep into which he had sunk, he was soon awakened by the warning pipe for the march, which passed close beneath the window, and then grew fainter in sound as Macdonuil-dhu strode on, arousing his comrades from their billets, and the wild notes died away in the dark and narrow streets of the city. The major sprang up at the well-known sound, and Ronald, although wearied and unrefreshed, prepared to follow him.

"Confound this fashion of Lord Wellington's! this marching always an hour before daybreak," muttered Campbell. "The morning is so chilly and cold, that my very teeth chatter, and——the devil! my canteen is empty," he added, shaking the little wooden barrel which went by that name, and one of which every officer and soldier on service carried slung in a shoulder-belt. "If you have nought in yours, Stuart, we must leave the house of the honourable Senor Narvaez Cifuentes without our *doch-an-dhoris*,* as we say at home in poor old Scotland, where men may sleep quietly at night, without fear of getting a dirk put into their wame. Shake your canteen, my boy! Is there a shot in the locker?"

Luckily for the thirsty commander, Ronald's last day's allowance of ration rum was untouched, and they now quaffed it between them to the regimental toast,—"Here's to the Highlandmen, shoulder to shoulder!" a sentiment well known among the Scottish mountaineers as a true military toast.

They now proceeded down stairs, where they found their patron seated in his wine-store, surrounded by the well-filled skins; he sat beside a rickety old table, on which he leaned with the clumsy and careless air that so well became his appearance; his chin rested on his hand, and his tangled black hair fell over his face, but from between the locks he eyed them with a gaze of intense ferocity as they entered. Campbell sternly shook his stick over his head, and tossing towards him a few reals for their last night's entertainment, passed with Ronald into the street, where the soldiers were under arms.

On leaving behind the town of Albuquerque, the sound of distant firing in front warned them of their nearer approach to the place of their destination, and the scene of actual hostilities. As they advanced, the sharp but scattered reports of musketry, and now and then the deeper boom of a field-piece, came floating towards them on the breeze which swept along the level places; but an eminence, upon which the ancient castle of Zagala is situated, obstructed their view of the hostile operations, and they pressed eagerly forward to gain the height, full of excitement and glee.

* Gaelic, meaning stirrup-cup.

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"Welcome to Spain!" cried an officer of the 13th Light Dragoons, who came galloping up from the rear, and reined in his jaded charger by the side of the marching Highlanders for a few minutes. "There is brave sport going on in front; press forward, my boys, and you may be in at the death, as we used to say at home in old Kent."

"What is going on in advance?" asked the major. "Are ours engaged?"

"I have little doubt that they are: Cameron never lags behind, you know. I was left in the rear at Albuquerque on duty, and am now hurrying forward to join the 13th, who belong to Long's cavalry brigade. They are now driving a party of plundering French out of La Nava; you will have a view of the whole affair when you gain the top of the hill. But I must not delay here: adieu!" and dashing the spurs into his horse, he disappeared behind the ruinous castle.

"Forward, men! double quick. Let us gain the head of the brae," cried Campbell, urging forward with cudgel and spur a miserable Rosinante, which he had procured at Lisbon.

Carrying their muskets at the long trail, the Highlanders advanced with that quick trot so habitual to the Scottish mountaineers, which soon brought them beneath the grass-grown battlements and mouldering towers of Zagala, from the eminence of which they now had an extensive view to the southward.

The horizon extended to about six or eight leagues, and all within that ample circle was waste and barren land, where the plough had been unknown for an age, and where nought seemed to flourish but weeds and little laurel-bushes. There was no trace of habitation around the plain, but far off appeared the deserted village of La Nava, near a leafless cork-wood, the bare boughs presenting but a poor background to roofless walls and solitary rafters. There was something chilling in so dreary a prospect, but most of the plains in the same province present a similar aspect, because in no part of Spain is agriculture more neglected than in Estremadura. It was early in the spring of the year, and traces of vegetation were becoming visible; the wood near La Nava was, as I have said, bare and leafless, but a few stunted shrubs by the way-side gave signs of budding. The ruddy sun was setting in the west behind the lofty Sierra de Montanches, the dark ridges of which rose behind the high city and castled rock of Albuquerque: the sky in every direction was of a clear cold blue, save around the sun, where large masses of gold and purple clouds seemed resting on the curved outline of the mountains, over which and through every opening the rays fell aslant, and were reflected by the arms of the troops who occupied the level plain, over which shone the long line of its setting splendour. From the height of Zagala they beheld the operations in front.

A party of five hundred French infantry were rapidly retreating towards the cork-wood, exposed to the continual fire of two twelve-pound field-pieces and the charges of the cavalry brigade under General Long, who took every opportunity of breaking among the little band through the gaps formed by the cannon-shot, which made complete lanes through their compact mass. The French retired with admirable coolness and bravery, keeping up a hot and rapid fire from four sides on the cavalry, who often charged them at full speed, brandishing their sabres, but were forced to recoil; and no sooner was a gap made in a face of a solid square by the fall of a file, than it was instantly filled by another. And thus leaving behind them a line of killed and wounded,

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they continued their retreat towards Merida, where their main body lay, disputing every foot of ground with desperate courage until they reached the cork-wood, which being unfavourable for the movements of the cavalry, the latter were obliged to retire with considerable loss.

"Hurrah!" cried Campbell, flourishing his stick; "I have not seen this sort of work for this year and more. You see, Stuart, that a solid square of bold infantry may laugh at a charge of horse, who must recoil from their bayonets like water from a rock. There are the 9th and 13th Light Dragoons, and the fire of the French seems to have cooled their chivalry a little, and shown them that a sabre is as nothing against brown Bess, with a bayonet on her muzzle. They are retiring towards us, after doing, however, all that brave hearts could do. Poor fellows! many of them are lying rolling about wounded and in agony, or already dead, near the skirts of that confounded copse by which the frog-eaters have escaped. But where are *ours?* I do not see Howard's brigade."

"Yonder they are, major," replied Ronald, "halted on the level place behind the ruined village. I see the bonnets of the Highlanders, and the colours."

"Ay, I see them now. Yonder they are, sure enough; and the old Half-hundred, and the 71st, the light bobs, with the tartan trews and hummel bonnets, all as spruce as ever, bivouacked comfortably on the bare earth as of old. We shall have the pleasure of passing the night without even a tent to keep the dew off us. *Carajo!* as the Spaniard says; you will now taste the delights of soldiering in good earnest, as I did first in Egypt with old Sir Ralph Abercrombie."

"We are seen by them. I hear the sound of the pipes, and they are waving their bonnets in welcome," said Alister Macdonald.

"Blow up your bags, Macdonuil-dhu, and let them hear the bray of the drones," cried Campbell, whacking the sides of his nag to urge her onward. "Push forward, brave lads! we will be with Fassifern and our comrades in a few minutes more."

Skirting the miserable village of La Nava, they soon arrived at the ground over which the advanced picquet of the enemy had retired. Two dead bodies attracted the eye of Ronald as he passed over them, and being the first men he had ever seen slain, and in so revolting a manner, they made an impression on his mind which was not easily effaced. They were young and good-looking men, and the same cannon-shot had mowed them both down. A complete hole was made in the body of one, and his entrails were scattered about; the legs of the other were carried away, and lay a few yards off, with a ball near them half buried in the turf. Their grenadier caps, each adorned with a brass eagle and red plume, had fallen off, and the frightful distortion of their livid features, with the wild glare of their white and glassy eyes, struck Ronald with a feeling of horror and compassion, which it was long ere he could forget.

"Queer work this!" said the major, coolly looking at them over his horse's flank, "and you don't seem to admire it much, Stuart; but you are a young soldier yet, and will get used to it by and by. Nothing hardens either the heart or the hide so much as a campaign or two. I learned that in Egypt."

"Puir callants! what would their mothers think, were they to see their bairns as they lie here noo?" soliloquized Evan, looking after them ruefully.

"It would be an awfu' sicht for them, or ony o' the peaceable folk

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at hame," replied another soldier: "But what can these twa queer chields wi' the muckle brimmed hats be wanting wi' them?"

"The Spanish dogs! Would to Heaven I might be allowed to shoot them dead," vociferated Campbell, making a motion with his hand towards the bear-skin covering of his holsters. "The scoundrels! they are come to rob and strip the dead."

Two Spanish peasants had approached the bodies, about which they exercised their hands so busily, that they soon plundered them of knapsacks, accoutrements, uniform, and everything, leaving the mutilated bodies stripped to the skin and exposed on the plain, while they made off towards La Nava with their spoil. A few minutes' more marching brought the major's detachment to the spot where the brigade of General Howard was halted on a piece of waste moorland, where the three corps had piled their arms, and were making such preparations for bivouacking for the night as could be made by men who had neither tent to cover them, nor couch to repose on but the bare and cold earth.

No tents at that time, or for long afterwards, were served out by the British Government to our troops in Spain, and their privations and misery were of course greatly increased by the want of proper means of encamping. The men were lying about in all directions, worn out and exhausted with the load they had carried and the fatigue of a long march; and the officers were reposing among them without ceremony. Apart from them all, on the right of the line, Colonel Cameron, of Fassifern, stood holding his caparisoned horse by the bridle, as was his usual custom, aloof alike from his officers and soldiers. He was a proud and strict commander, who kept the former "at the staff's end," as the military saying is, behaving to them in a manner at once haughty, cold, and distant; and yet withal he was a good officer, a brave soldier, and beloved by his regiment, which would have stood by him to the last man. He was a well-made figure, above the middle height; his features were handsome, and his hair was fair and curly. There was ever a proud and fiery sort of light in his dark blue eyes, which, when he was excited, were wont to sparkle and flash with peculiar brilliancy—an expression which never failed to produce its due effect upon beholders. To him the major reported his arrival, and introduced the officers one by one.

He eyed Ronald Stuart, of whom he had heard previously, with a keen Highland glance, and asked some questions about his family and his father.

"I have often heard of the Stuarts of Lochisla," said he, "but have never had the pleasure of seeing one till now. Sir John Stuart, of the Tower, saved the life and honour of my grandfather Lochiel, at the risk of his own, on the bloody field of Culloden. I am happy to have the descendant of so brave a man an officer of the Gordon Highlanders."

"Ensign Macdonald, colonel," said the major, presenting Alister.

"Macdonald? Ah!" said Cameron, bowing, "your family is not unknown to me. I have had letters from Glengarry, and all the Macdonalds of the Isles, respecting you;" and thus he went on, as there was scarcely an officer introduced to him whose family was not well known in the North. After some little conversation, Ronald withdrew to where the officers were grouped around the bulky figure of Campbell, asking a hundred questions about the news from home, &c.

There was scarcely an officer or private of the new comers but was

met and greeted by some kinsman or old friend, whose canteen of ration rum, or Lisbon wine, was at his service; and loud were the shouts of laughter and merriment that arose on all sides. Eager and earnest were the inquiries about village homes and paternal hearths in "the land of the mountain and the flood," and to many a Jean, Jessy, and Tibby, were the wooden canteens drained to their dregs; but although the fun "grew fast and furious" amongst many, there were some whose hearts grew sad at the intelligence which their comrades brought, of some grey head, which they loved and revered, being laid in the dust in some old and well-remembered kirk-yard; or of a faithless Jenny, who preferred a lover at home to one far away in Spain.

As the shades of night darkened over the plain of La Nava, the sounds died away; and stretching their bare legs on the dewy earth, the hardy Highlanders reposed between the pyramids of firelocks and bayonets that glittered in the red glare of the watch-fires, lighted at certain distances throughout the bivouac, which became quiet for the night, after strong picquets had been posted in the direction of Merida, where fifteen hundred French, under the command of General Dombrouski (a Pole in Buonaparte's service), were quartered. Rolled up in a cloak and blanket, Ronald laid himself down like the rest, with the basket-hilt of his claymore for a pillow, and clay for his bed; but to sleep in a situation so new and uncomfortable was almost impossible, and he often raised his head to view the strange scene around him.

The ruddy blaze of the fires was cast upon the worn uniform, faded tartan, and sun-burnt knees and faces of the soldiers, giving a strong light and shade, which increased the picturesque and romantic appearance of the bivouac. The arms of the sentries flashed in the light, as they paced slowly to and fro on their posts; and farther off were seen the motionless forms of the cavalry videttes, appearing like black equestrian statues in the distance, standing perfectly still, with their long dark cloaks flowing over their horses' flanks; but as the night grew darker, and the light of the watch-fires waned, these distant objects could be no longer discerned.

The bright stars were twinkling in the dark blue sky, and among them a red planet in the west (the *Ton-thena* of Ossian), which Ronald used to watch for hours at midnight from the battlements of the tower at Lochisla, while listening to the ancient tales of war or woe related by Donald Iverach.

He thought sadly of his home, and of poor Alice Lisle. He gazed upon her miniature until the flickering light of the fire failed him, and then dropped into an uneasy slumber, from which he was startled more than once by the deep howling of wild dogs, or other animals, from that part of the plain where the dead bodies of the slain lay uninterred.

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CHAPTER VII.

MERIDA.

"All was prepared—the fire, the sword, the men—
To wield them in their terrible array.
The army, like a lion from his den,
March'd forth with nerve and sinews bent to slay—
A human hydra, issuing from its pen
To breathe destruction on its winding way,
Whose heads were heroes, which, cut off in vain,
Immediately in others grew again."

Don Juan, canto viii.

TOWARDS morning a storm of rain and wind arose, and none but those who have experienced it can imagine the manifold miseries of a tentless bivouac on such an occasion. Howling dismally among the trees of the cork-wood, the cold wind swept over the desert plain, and the sleety rain descended in torrents, drenching the unsheltered soldiers to the skin, and extinguishing their fires; as the cold increased towards daybreak, they cursed the order which had halted them in so exposed and dreary a spot, to which even the cork-wood or ruins of La Nava would have been preferable.

It became fair about daybreak, and Ronald, unable to remain longer on the ground, where the water was actually forming in puddles around him, arose; and so wet was the soil, that the impression made by the weight of his body was almost immediately filled with water. His limbs were so benumbed and stiff, that he could scarcely move, and his clothing was drenched through the blanket and cloak in which he had been muffled up. The soldiers, worn out with the fatigues of the preceding day, lay still until the last moment for rest, and slept in ranks close together for warmth, with their muskets under their great coats, and their knapsacks beneath their heads for pillows. Here and there, apart from the rest, one might be seen with his miserable wife and two or three little children huddled close beside him, all nestling under the solitary blanket (provided by Government for each man), from which the steam arose in a column, owing to the heat of their bodies acting on the rain-soaked covering. The distant sentinels and cavalry videttes were standing motionless and silent at intervals along the plain, where banks of white mist were rolling slowly in the yellow lustre of the morning sun, the rising light of which was gilding the summits of the mountains above Albuquerque. All was misery and unutterable discomfort. Ronald wrung the water from the feathers of his bonnet, and kept himself in motion to dry his regimentals and underclothing, which stuck close to his skin. He now perceived that, in addition to his blanket, Evan had, during the storm, cast over him his own great coat, standing out the misery of the night in his thin uniform. When he met Ronald's eye, he was shivering with cold, exhaustion, and want of sleep.

"O Evan! my faithful but foolish fellow, what is this you have done? Did you really strip yourself for me, and pass the night thus exposed?" exclaimed Ronald, his heart overflowing with tumultuous feelings at the kindness of his humble follower and old friend.

"I thocht ye would be cauld, sir," replied Evan, his teeth chattering

while he spoke, "and my heart bled to see ye lying there like a beast o' the field on the dreary muir, in siccan a miserable and eerie nicht. For me it mattered naething—for neither my name nor bluid are gentle. I'm the son of your faither's vassal; and, Maister Ronald, I did but my duty—what my puir auld faither would hae wished me to do."

"See that you never again subject yourself to such a privation on my account; and Heaven knows, Evan, I will not forget your kindness," said Ronald, laying his hand familiarly on the tufted wing which adorned Iverach's shoulder. "You appear to be perishing with cold, and my canteen is empty. See if your comrade, Angus Mackie, or any one, will give you a drop of something to warm you. Where is the colonel? I do not see him."

"Lying yonder, on the bieldy side of his horse."

"And Mr. Macdonald—"

"Is sleeping by the bieldy side of the major, and a burn of water rinnin round them. Och, sirs! its awfu' wark this for gentlemen's sons."

"Rouse, Alister," said Ronald, stirring him with his sword; "we shall get under arms immediately. I see, through the mist yonder, that Howard is preparing to mount." He shaded the rays of the sun from his eyes with his hand, and perceived at some distance the brigadier, with his tall cocked-hat and large military cloak, examining the girths of his saddle and the holsters, while he despatched the brigade-major to the officers commanding regiments. The long roll of several drums, sounding dull and muffled with the rain, immediately followed, rousing the bivouac; and the troops "stood to their arms," preparatory to moving off, all draggled and wet, and with empty stomachs, in the direction of the enemy, who were to be driven from Merida at the point of the bayonet.

The women and camp-followers were sent off to the rear, where the baggage-mules were halted on the La Nava road; the wet cloaks and blankets were rolled up for the march, the officers slinging theirs in their sashes of crimson silk, while those of the soldiers were strapped to their knapsacks.

"Uncase the colours, gentlemen. Examine your flints," cried Cameron, touching his bonnet to the officers, as he rode along the front of the line.

In a few minutes the troops moved off in close column, with the light cavalry on their flanks; and making a circuit about the plain, advanced upon Merida, skirting the cork-wood through which the French had retired on the preceding evening. Ronald scanned the plain with an earnest eye in search of the two dead men, the slaughter of whom had haunted his mind during the whole of the last night; and the reader may conceive the disgust which he and others experienced, when, on the spot where they had fallen, the scattered bones of two skeletons were discovered, red and raw as they had been left by wild animals, which had been busy upon them the live-long night. Yesterday they were active young soldiers, animated, probably, with spirit, courage, and many a noble sentiment; to-day they were bare skeletons, left to bleach unburied on the plain; as the troops had no time to inter them. The old campaigners faced them with comparative indifference; but there was altogether something rather appalling to so young a soldier as Ronald in the lesson of war and mortality before him, and gloomy feelings, which he endeavoured to shake off, took possession of his mind. But it was not a time to appear depressed when there was a

chance of hearing shot whizzing in an hour or so more, and his spirits rose as the six regimental pipers, with their major, Macdonuil-dhu, in their front, struck up a well-known Scottish quick-step, and all pressed forward in hopes of driving the enemy from their post, and obtaining a meal there.

During a march of several miles, they saw but little of the boasted fruitfulness of Spain. The soil appeared rich enough in some parts, but it lay untended and untilled, for the roll of the drum and the glitter of arms had scared away the husbandman and vine-dresser, making the once-peaceful peasantry either prowling plunderers or fierce and savage guerillas, turning the plough-share into a sword, and a fertile country into a neglected wilderness.

As the wood of La Nava lessened in the rear, the city of Merida, situated on a high hill, around the base of which the Guadiana wandered amid groves of cork-wood, laurel, and olive, presented itself to view. Merida, one of the most ancient cities in Spain, was once the capital of a province of the same name, and numerous are the remains of Roman and Gothic grandeur which are preserved within the circle of its mouldering fortifications.

Dombrouski, a brave soldier of fortune in the service of France, commanded the enemy, and he had put the town in the best possible state of defence by raising a few redoubts on the granite hill beside the city. He barricadoed the streets with the furniture of the citizens, and all that the soldiers could lay hands on for the purpose; the suburban houses and walls were loop-holed, and the Pole was determined to defend his post, if a force came against it for which he deemed himself a match; but when the waving colours and polished arms of Sir Rowland Hill's division, sixteen thousand strong, appeared descending the gentle slope towards the city, he saw the folly of his resolution, and prepared to abandon his position. On the nearer approach of the British, they beheld the corps of Dombrouski formed outside the town, preparatory to moving off by the ancient Roman bridge, the lofty arches of which span the deep waters of the Guadiana. On a front movement being made among our cavalry, the French, not wishing to feel the steel of those who had so lately gained the battle of Arroya-del-Molino, retreated double quick, without firing a shot; and in a short time the glitter of their appointments and the flashing tops of their glazed shakoes disappeared among the olive-groves and broken ground in the direction of the town of Almendralejo, where a strong party lay, commanded by the Count d'Erlon. The division halted, and bivouacked about Merida, to which those inhabitants who had fled during its occupation by Dombrouski returned: the streets were filled with acclamations of welcome to the British, and the bells rang merrily from the steeples of the churches and convents. A small ration was now served out to the half-famished soldiers, and thousands of fires were lit in every direction; while all the camp kettles and pans were put in requisition for cooking, and the axes, saws, and bill-hooks of the pioneers made devastation among the underwood and wild groves to procure fuel.

The miserable ration consisted of a few ounces of flour and flesh, given to each man alike, without distinction. The flesh was that of ill-fed, jaded, and wearied bullocks, which had become too old for agricultural labour, driven up rapidly after the army. Those given to each regiment were instantly shot through the head, flayed, and in a twinkling served out in the allotted quantities, which were placed warm

in the camp-kettles to boil, almost before the circulation of the blood, or the vibration of the fibres had ceased.

This was the usual way in which the military rations were served out in Spain,—killed and eaten when the animals were in a state of fever from long and hasty journeys,—tough and hard as bend-leather, in consequence of age, ill-feeding, and want of proper cooking.

More lucky than thousands of their comrades, who pursued their culinary operations in the open air, Ronald and Alister Macdonald obtained possession of a deserted shed or house in the suburbs, where Evan Iverach, casting aside his accoutrements, began to prepare in the best manner he could the poor meal, for which, however, the appetites of all were sufficiently sharpened, for they had not broken their fast since they quitted Albuquerque.

The wretched apartment had neither windows nor shutters to boast of; and the arms of leafless vines straggled in at the apertures, through which, now and then, the swarthy face of a passing Spaniard appeared, looking in with evident curiosity. Strong black rafters crossed by red tiles, the joints of which admitted the daylight, composed the roof; the floor was earth pounded hard by means of a pavior's rammer, or some such instrument. As the room had no fire-place, Evan made one by means of two stones placed in the centre of the floor; between them was kindled a fire with one of the doors, which Ronald had torn down, and hewn in pieces with his sword.

The smoke filled the place, and rolled in volumes out at every aperture. A large stone and Evan's knapsack set on end composed their furniture, and, seated thus, they set about the discussion of their meal, which when cooked was but a sorry mess, being merely the tough flesh boiled with the flour, without the aid of a single vegetable,—tasteless and insipid; but hunger is said to be "the best sauce," and they despatched it with infinite relish. Each had produced his knife, fork, and spoon from his havresack, a strong bag of coarse linen, in which provisions are carried on service, and their dinner-set was complete.

"Hech me, airs! I would rather sup sour crowdy at the ingle neuk o' auld Lochisla, than chow sic fashionless trash as this," said Evan with strong contempt, as he sat squatted on the floor, taking his share of the provision out of a camp-kettle lid, and scarcely seen amid the smoke. "It micht pass muster wi' a puir chield like me; but I trow it's no for sic as you, Maister Ronald, or you, Maister Macdonald, or ony gentleman o' that ilk."

"It is confounded stuff, certainly," replied Alister, laughing at the young Highlander's quaint mode of expression; "the flesh is as tough as a buff belt, and the old bull it belonged to has seen hard service, no doubt, in his day. But I wish that we had a drop of the purple Lisbon wine to wash it down with, eh, Ronald?"

"We are better off than our Portuguese comrades, however bad our present fare; they, poor fellows, have only received a few ounces of wheat each man."

"And an unco chappin' they are making by the water-side, sir, ilka man pounding his wheat between twa stanes, into something to mak' bannocks wi'. Puir black-avised deevils! I pity them muckle," observed Evan, who, from many circumstances combined, presumed to break the laws of military etiquette, and mingle in the conversation. "It's an unco thing to march far wi' an empty wame and fecht fasting. It makes my very heart loup like a laverock, when I think o' the braw

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Scots' brochan and kail, that the miserable folk here ken naething abeot. O, it's a puir hole this Spain, I think, either to fecht or forage in."

"If you grumble thus, Evan, I shall be led to suppose you will make but a poor soldier. We have seen little of Spain yet; the best part of the country and the summer are still before us, and let us hope that this is the worst. But there is little pleasure in abiding in this wretched sheiling, where we are almost choked and blinded with smoke. Let us find out some wine-house, where we can get something to gargle our throats with. Come, Macdonald, we shall be smoked like deer's hams, if we sit here longer. There are the ruins of the Roman amphitheatre, and other things in this city of Merida, which I would wish to see, and our time is short; we march again in the morning, as you know."

On passing down the principal street, their attention was attracted by the ruins of a noble triumphal arch (a relic of the Roman power), under which lay mouldering fragments of the rich cornice and marble statues that had fallen from above. Near the arch stood two tall Corinthian columns, upwards of forty feet in height, the last remnants of some magnificent temple.

The houses were lofty, and decorated with heavy entablatures, pilasters, and ornaments of stucco or plaster, some of them richly gilt, and many had broad balconies of stone or iron projecting over the pavement. On some of them appeared dark-haired and dark-eyed *Senoritas*, wearing the long sweeping veil and graceful black mantilla, of which so much has been said by romancers, surveying with smiles of wonder and pleasure, the strange scene of so many foreign uniforms crowding the streets, and waving their fans and handkerchiefs, crying to the British officers who passed them, "*Viva! la valiante Inglesa! viva!*"

"What beautiful eyes and splendid figures these girls have," said Macdonald rapturously, doffing his bonnet to a group of fair ones, whose attention their Highland garb had attracted. "By Heaven! we have no such eyes at home. How they flash under their long lashes! I never beheld such glossy curls as those that stream from under their veils."

"I have, Alister," was Ronald's brief reply.

"Ay, in her whose miniature you wear under the fold of your shoulder-belt; I saw it for an instant the other day at Albuquerque. Nay, nay, man, you need not colour or look so cross; I shall not tell any of our fellows, and we have no mess here to try your fiery temper by jokes and quizzing. But keep it in a more secure place; should it be seen by Grant or Bevan, or any of them, it may become the source of continual jesting."

"Those who dare to jest with me on such a subject may find it dangerous work," said Ronald, coldly and haughtily. "But here is the place we have been looking for—the *Caza de Vino*."

A bunch of gilded grapes, suspended over the door of a low flat-roofed building, announced it to be the shop of a retailer of wine. The doorway was crowded by British, Portuguese, and German officers, who were pressing their way in and out, intermixed with a few cigar-smoking citizens, wearing broad *sombreros* and the eternal long Spanish cloak, enveloping their whole form in a manner not ungraceful, but in the style of mysterious gentry on the stage, rendering it impossible to discover their rank in society; in fact, all the Spaniards they beheld

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were exactly like one another. All smoked cigars with the same air of immovable gravity; all wore the same sombre attire, and strode under the piazzas of the Plaza with the same haughty swagger. To stroll about smoking by day, and to sit listlessly at night muffled in their mantles, with their feet resting on a pan of hot charcoal while they sipped their sour wine, appeared to be their only employment.

Ronald and his friend made their way into a spacious oblong apartment, fitted up in the plainest manner with rough deal seats and tables, at which sat many of the officers of the second division,—the red, or rather purple coats of the British, the blue of the Portuguese, the green of the German rifles, and the brown of a few Spaniards, being intermingled. Several olive-cheeked young girls, with their long black hair streaming unbound, wearing short petticoats, large bustles, and high-heeled shoes, were continually tripping about, and serving the country wine in all kinds of vessels, from which it was rapidly transferred to the throats of the thirsty carousers; and a strange din of several languages and many sonorous voices shook the rafters of the place.

"A devil of a den this. Let us quit it as soon as possible," said Macdonald, draining his horn of dark liquor.

"As soon as you please. I am almost stifled with the fumes of garlic from the Portuguese, and tobacco from the Germans. Look at old Blacier, of the 60th Rifles, how quietly he sits in that corner, filling the whole place with the smoke of his long pipe."

"Looking as grave as his serene mightiness of Hesse Humbug. But I do not see any of ours here."

"There's Campbell, sitting beside Armstrong, of the 71st; doubtless he is fighting some battle in Egypt over again. He speaks so earnestly, that he is not aware of our presence,—and yonder is Chisholm."

"Stuart," exclaimed Alister, abruptly, "who can that strange fellow be who seems to scrutinize you so narrowly? See, behind the chair of Blacier, in the dark recess of the doorway."

Ronald looked in the direction pointed out, and beheld the fierce serpent-like eyes of a well-known face fixed on him with a settled stare.

"It is the rascal Narvaez," whispered Ronald, making a stride towards the place; but the worthy, pulling his sombrero over his face, pressed through the crowd, gained the door, and disappeared.

"Pshaw! let him go," said Alister, holding Ronald back by his silk sash. "You surely would not follow him? You are neither an alcalde nor an alguazil, and you need not care how many he sends to the shades. He eyes you with a look that bodes you no good, and the revengeful disposition of these swarthy gentlemen is well known. I would advise you to be on your guard; perhaps he is dogging you for your squabble at Albuquerque."

"If ever I meet the vagabond on a hill side," replied Ronald, angrily, "I will teach him to model his face differently, when he dares to look at me."

"Ay; but 'tis not decently on the hill side that disputes are settled here. A stab in the dark, or a shot from behind a hedge, ends matters, and all is over," answered Macdonald, as they issued into the street, after settling with the *patron*. "And now, before it is quite dark, let us take a view of the amphitheatre. I see its ruins above the flat-roofed houses at the end of the street yonder, and a bold outline it rears against the clear sky of the evening."

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CHAPTER VIII.

AN ADVENTURE.

"The troops exulting sat in order round,
And beaming fires illumin'd all the ground:
A thousand piles the dusky horrors gild,
And shoot a shady lustre o'er the field.
Full fifty guards each flaming pile attend,
Whose umber'd arms by fits thick flashes send;
Loud neigh the coursers o'er their heaps of corn,
And ardent warriors wait the rising morn."

Iliad, book viii.

It was almost dusk when they entered the vast and gloomy ruins of the amphitheatre, the appearance of which was rendered doubly impressive by the sombre light in which it was viewed. The broad arena, where once the bold gladiator contended for honour, or the wretched malefactor for his life, straining every desperate energy in battle with the fiercest animals of the wilderness, was now overgrown with grass, as were also the wide circles of seats rising from it; and from the arcades of arches, from the mouldered cornices, the shattered columns, and empty niches, waved weeds and nettles, showing how vain was the pride of the founder and the architect, and telling that time was too powerful for the mightiest work of human hands,—that man's labours, like himself, are perishable.

In some places great masses of masonry had fallen down, where the clamps of iron and brass had mouldered away, and ponderous architraves and fragments of friezes, bearing ornaments and Roman inscriptions, were lying in the centre of the arena half buried in the soil. All was silence and ruinous desolation now in the place where once the beautiful, the brave, and the noble, had witnessed and applauded soul-stirring deeds of martial prowess, manly strength, and unequalled cruelty and ferocity. Its vast arcades and empty galleries rang no more with the flourish of the trumpet, the clash of cymbals, the shout which greeted the triumphant victor in the lists, the yell or the dying groan of his vanquished opponent.

From the grass-covered arena, around which appeared the dark dens where lions, tigers, and other savage animals had been confined, Ronald and his friend clambered up the stone seats, which rose one above another like a flight of broad steps, until they gained the uppermost corridor or gallery, which ran round the whole fabric on the outside. From this eminence they obtained a view of the scenery below and around them. Night had now set in, and darkness reigned in the streets of Merida. Towering above the low roofs appeared the other remains of Roman greatness,—the noble arch which had rung so often to the tread of their martial legions, and the shattered temple where marble gods had received the fervent adoration of idolaters.

A thousand watch-fires cast their lurid glare on the silent waters of the Guadiana, on the dark groves of olive overhanging its glassy surface, on the lofty outline of the Roman bridge, and on the black buildings of the adjacent town, from the bivouac of Sir Rowland's division. The piles of burnished arms glittered in the light, which was reflected by the bayonets of the sentries at the river side, and by the

sabres of the far-off cavalry videttes, and of the advanced picquets on its opposite side, keeping watch and ward on the road to Almendralejo. A low hum of many mingled voices rose from the place where the soldiers lay, mingled with the occasional neigh of a horse, the sharper sound of the cavalry trumpet turning out the picquets, or the roll of a distant infantry drum recalling stragglers echoing among the granite crags and dying away in the thickets by the water side; and nearer rang the more discordant noise of laughter and reckless military merriment from the wine-house in the neighbouring street.

"Yonder is the evening star glimmering above the summit of the dark mountain to the southward of us," observed Ronald, in a low tone; "it rises twinkling just as I have seen it rising above the noble Benmore, in Perthshire; and while I view its well-known appearance, my heart fills with strange emotions. I can almost fancy myself at home in the Highlands,—at home in my father's house."

"I am animated by similar feelings," replied Macdonald, in the same subdued voice. "Many that love us dearly may at this moment be watching it and thinking of us. Many a summer gloaming, in my dismal moods, I have watched it rising amid the white breakers, and shining above the ruined spire of Iona, while the empty arches of the cathedral were illumined with the red flush of the setting sun. Ah, Stuart! I know these places well: my father dwells in Inch-kenneth, in the wild and surf-beaten western isles. It is a sweet little place the Inch, with dark foliage hanging from the tall rocks over the boiling ocean. These ruins around us are all very well in their way, but I would not give the Runic cross and the Culdee's cell, which cover the graves of my ancestors, even for all the ruins of Rome! But let us not begin to muse thus: I shall become too melancholy to feel agreeable. We must retrace our steps to the bivouac, for both fighting and hard marching are before us in the morning, over the hills yonder," said he, pointing in the direction of Almendralejo, where a faint crimson streak illumined the dark sky, caused probably by the watch-fires of D'Erlon's troops.

"What! do you think of returning to the den where we cooked our splendid repast?"

"We should be eaten up by rats and the Spanish musquitoes before morning; better the bivouac where our comrades stretch their bare legs on the cold sod. Fassifern would ill like us seeking even the shelter of a kennel, while he sleeps as usual under the heels of his horse, with the pommel of his saddle for a pillow."

"You speak of a kennel; I assure you, Macdonald, that last night I envied the old barrel in which our household dog at Lochisla takes his repose in the barbican. But we shall lose ourselves here, the streets are so dark and strange." As he spoke, they had quitted the ruins of the amphitheatre, and entered a dark and silent street leading towards the Plaza. It was empty, and its stillness was broken only by the ripple of the Guadiana, chafing against the stone quay at one end, past which its broad and rapid current flowed unceasingly.

"Have Sir Rowland and his staff quarters in Merida?"

"I have not heard that they have. But hush! we have something here that savours of romance," replied Macdonald, as they heard the notes of a guitar sounding as if struck by a bold and firm hand; and immediately (the prelude being over) a fine, clear, and manly voice sang a song, which being in Spanish, was not understood by his

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listeners, excepting the burden which he repeated at the end of every verse:—

"Yo acuerdo de te, querida,—
Adios! adios!"

"What cavaliero is this?" whispered Macdonald. "I thought that these days of serenading had passed away, even in Spain."

"I know him: it is Alvaro de Villa Franca, a captain of the Spanish cavalry. I see the tall outline of his figure now, and I well know his helmet with the red horse-hair on its crest."

"Keep under the shadow of the houses, Stuart; perhaps he may sing again. But he surely hears us; he is looking round."

The form of the Spanish officer, the outline of his high helmet, and his large bullion epaulettes were now distinctly visible. When his song ceased, a window above opened, a light flashed through the shutters, and a lady appeared on the iron balcony; she clapped her hands, and the dragoon drew near, when a conversation, carried on in low and earnest tones, ensued. The don had placed his hand on the lower part of the balcony, preparatory to swinging himself up, when a noise in the street caused the lady to start away, and close the shutters of the window with the utmost precipitation.

"*Caramba!*" cried the Spaniard, fiercely turning round and endeavouring to pierce the darkness which enveloped the stradi: but nothing could be discovered. After a vain attempt again to obtain a hearing from the lady, he took his guitar under his arm, and proceeded leisurely down the street on the darkest side, as if to elude observation, still humming the burden of his ditty, "Adios, querida,"* while his heavy spurs and long steel scabbard clattered in accompaniment. The two British officers had turned to pursue their way towards the Plaza, when a cry of "*Diavolo! Ah, perros—ladrones! Carajo!*" burst from the Spaniard, followed immediately by a clashing of steel blades, the noise of which drew Ronald and Alister hastily to the spot. Here they found Don Alvaro, with his back to the wall, contending fiercely with his single weapon against six armed men, from whose swords and poniards he made the fire fly at every stroke he dealt, keeping them at bay with admirable courage and skill.

"One, two, three—six to one! the rascally cowards! Draw, Alister,—draw and strike in," cried Ronald, unsheathing his sword, an example which his companion was not slow in following, and all three were soon engaged, two to one, against the assailants of Alvaro, who were surprised at this unexpected attack, and fought with double desperation to escape. The whole of Ronald's long-nourished love of tumult, his fiery spirit and inherent fierceness, broke forth in this martial fray, and indeed he was put to his mettle. No fewer than three of the ruffians fell upon him pell mell, cutting and thrusting with their long blades, while they watched every opportunity to use the sharper stilettoes which armed their left hands. Ronald's regimental gorget saved him from one deadly thrust at his throat, and the thick folds of his plaid, where they crossed the iron plate of his left epaulette-strap, saved him from more than one downright blow. Sweeping his long claymore round him, with both his hands clenched in its basket-hilt, he fought with the utmost energy, but only on the defensive, and was compelled to retire backwards step by step towards the quay of the

* Farewell, love.

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Guadiana, where he must have been inevitably drowned or slain, but for the timely interference of a fourth sword, which, mingling its strokes with theirs, struck the three Spanish blades to shivers. Two of the fellows immediately fled, and plunging into the river swam to the opposite bank; the third would have followed, but Ronald, grasping him by the throat, adroitly struck the poinard from his hand, and pinning him to the earth, placed his foot upon his neck. At the same moment Alister Macdonald passed his long claymore through the body of the fourth, who fell shreiking—"*Santa Maria! O Dios! O Dios!*" and almost instantly expired. The other two, who had been driven far off by the Spanish officer, now fled, and the brawl was ended.

"Hot work this, gentlemen," said Campbell, in his usual jocular tone. It was his sword which had intervened so opportunely between Ronald and destruction. "The fray has been bravely fought and gallantly finished. You have drawn your sword to-night for the first time, Stuart, and proved yourself a lad of the proper stuff. Keep your foot tight upon that growling scoundrel, and if he dares to stir, pin him to the pavement. This affair beats hollow my brawl at Grand Cairo, when we were in Egypt with Sir Ralph. By the bye, what did the fray begin about?"

"I am sure I cannot say," replied Ronald, panting with his late exertion; "but for your prompt assistance, major, it might have ended otherwise. Alister, I am glad you have disposed of your opponent in so secure a manner,—yet his horrid death-cry rings strangely in my ears." A grim smile curled the handsome features of Macdonald, who wiped his sword in his tartan plaid, and jerked it into the sheath in silence.

"*Senores—officiales*, I thank you for the good service you have rendered me to-night," said the Spanish officer in good English, while he made a low obeisance, "and am happy that you have all escaped unharmed: but we must dispose of this remaining villain. Be pleased to stand aside, senor, that I may run him through the heart. A fair thrust from the blade of a noble cavaliero is too good a death for such a fellow."

"Sir, I should be sorry to thwart you in your pleasure, but have a little patience, pray," replied the major, laughing at the coolness of the don's request, and parrying with his stick a thrust made at the bravo, who lay prostrate under Ronald's foot. "As this fellow's skin is whole, he may be inclined to let you know his employer, or what all this row began about."

"Right, senor; I had forgotten that. Dog!" cried Don Alvaro, fiercely dashing his guitar into a thousand fragments on the head of the bravo, "tell me who employed your rascal hands against my person! You will not answer? Well, we must prove what materials your skin is made of. By Santiago! I will have it flayed off you with a red-hot sabre, if you do not confess! The tortures of the Inquisition will be as nothing to what I will inflict on your miserable body, if you are stubborn. Aid me, noble senors, in taking this wretch to the Conventq de San Juan de Merida, in the Plaza; my troop is quartered there. 'Tis but a pistol-shot from here."

It was impossible to refuse. Don Alvaro tied tightly with his silk sash the hands of the captive, who was dragged without ceremony from street to street, to the entrance of a narrow dark alley leading to the convent of Saint John, the front of which looked towards the Plaza.

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"*Quien vive?*" challenged the Spanish trooper on sentry with his carbine in the Gothic porch.

"*Espana,*" returned the don, as they passed into the gloomy body of the building, in the vast extent of which their footsteps awoke a thousand echoes.

"Ho! there, *sargentos y soldados!*" cried Alvaro. "Pedro Gomez, a light—a light! Rouse,—do you hear me?"

A strange bustle immediately rose around them, and a sargento appeared bearing a lamp, the light of which revealed his brown uniform, and browner features. They found themselves in the chapel of the convent, and the red glare of the blazing lamp was cast on its fluted columns, groined arches, and Gothic ornaments, giving a wild and romantic appearance to the scene, which was heightened by the presence of Don Alvaro's troop. About sixty fine Spanish steeds, with flowing tails and manes, stood ranged on each side of the nave of the building, saddled and bridled, bearing the carbines, holsters, and valises of their riders, who, muffled in their long brown cloaks, with their swords and helmets beside them, were sleeping among the horse-litter, or looking up surprised at the interruption. Every man lay beside his horse, and their tall lances were reared against the shafted pillars, from which military accoutrements, curry-combs, horse-brushes, &c., were suspended from the necks of angels and other effigies that adorned them.

"Pedro Gomez, raise the light," said Alvaro, "and let us see the face of this fellow, who to-night raised his hand against the life of your captain."

"*Dios mio!*" cried Pedro, placing the lamp within an inch of the prisoner's nose.

"The villain Narvaez, by heavens!" exclaimed Ronald, recoiling at the expression of indescribable hatred and ferocity legible in the ruffian's countenance, while his eyes shone with the sparkle of a demon's as the sullen glare of the lamp fell on their black balls.

"How d'ye do, Senor Cifuentes? Speak up, man. You are the very prince of rascals!" said the major, giving him a prob in the stomach with his stick.

"What!" exclaimed Macdonald, scrutinizing him with disgust and curiosity, "is this the fellow you told us about? the keeper of the wine-house at Albuquerque?"

"Ay, the same," answered Ronald; "a wretch who slew in cold blood the French officers. But he shall not escape us now."

"If I should, you shall live to repent it,—you shall, by the holy mother of God!" said the bold ruffian with a scornful smile.

A few words made Don Alvaro acquainted with the story of Narvaez.

"Fellow!" said he sternly, "I might almost forgive you the slaughter of the four Frenchmen,—I wish, however, that it had been done less treacherously; but for this attempt on my own life you shall hang, and that instantly, by San Juan of Merida! as a warning to all low-born knaves to beware ere they draw their weapons on a noble hidalgo. Diego de la Zarza, Pedro Gomez! bring hither a horse-halter, some of you," cried he to the astonished troopers who crowded round. "Run this fellow up to the roof. Santos! do you hear?"

He had scarcely spoken, before Pedro Gomez cast his horse's halter over the neck of a gigantic stone angel, whose extended wings, carved on a corbelled stone, supported one of the oak beams of the roof, and prepared with ready hands a noose with a slip-knot to encircle the neck

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of Narvaez, who beheld these summary preparations with considerable trepidation; and he would soon have swung a corse, but for the interference of the three British officers, who, natives of a clime where the passions are less violent than in Spain, revolted at the idea of so sudden an execution.

"Stay, Don Alvaro, and put off his exit until to-morrow," said Campbell. "I do not admire such quick despatch, athough I have seen a Turk's head fly off like a thistle's top, when I was in Egypt with Sir Ralph."

"It would be losing time in the morning, as we march by daybreak," replied the Don; "but worthless as the villain is, I may alter my decree if he gives me the name of his base employer."

"The husband of her whom you serenaded this night in the Calle de San Juan," answered Narvaez in a guttural tone.

"What! the guerilla chief, Don Salvador Xavier de Zagala?" cried Alvaro furiously, his eyes flashing fire. "Base coward! ignoble hidalgo! But my sword shall reach him ere long, if he is to be found on this side of the Pyrenees,—it shall, by the bones of the Cid! Your five rascal comrades were guerillas of his band. I thought I knew the scarlet caps of the vagabonds."

"Noble cavalier! do not forget your promise," said Narvaez supplicatingly. "What is now your decree?"

"That you shall be shot in the morning instead of being hanged to-night! Sargento Gomez, see this carried into execution punctually, before the trumpets sound 'to horse,' as you value your life."

With all the indifference that he assumed at first, Cifuentes was a coward at heart, and piteous were the entreaties he made for mercy, and the promises he gave of reformation for the future, if the cavalier would spare his life; but they were unheeded. The dragoons thrust him into a narrow dormitory adjoining the chapel, and a sentinel, with his carbine loaded, was placed at the door.

"Send for the Padre, Alvarez; and let him make his peace with Heaven."

"Noble senor, it will be difficult to find the reverend Padre in his sober senses at this hour," replied Gomez.

"You are right, Pedro; he has no longer the Holy Inquisition, of terrible memory, to scare him from his cups. This fellow may die easily enough, without the help of Latin. Should he make the slightest attempt to escape, remember, Diego de la Zarza, to shoot him dead without fail. And now, senors, let us retire and leave my troopers to repose, as we must be all in our saddles at crow of the cock."

"What will be done with the fellow who lies dead in the street?" asked Ronald, as they stumbled down the dark alley leading from the convent.

"What could we do with him, senor?" replied the don with surprise. "The carcase will be found in the morning, and the finder will bury it for the sake of the clothes, perhaps. To find a man stabbed in the street is no marvellous matter in our Spanish towns. You saw how little notice the clash of our swords attracted: scarcely a window opened, and no person approached. We take these affairs coolly here, senor."

"So it seems, Don Alvaro," said the major. "But there is the clock of the town-house striking the hour of eleven, and we have a weary route before us in the morning; so the sooner we seek some

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place to roost in the better. I left Colonel Cameron and the rest of ours preparing for repose, under the bieldy side of a granite craig,—but I fear you don't understand me,—at the confounded bivouac yonder; and the sooner we join them, the longer rest we shall have."

"You shall have no bivouacking to-night, senors. One gets quite enough of it in these times; and when a good billet comes in the way, it should be accepted. I reside in Merida; my family mansion is at the corner of the Plaza: you shall pass the night with me there. My sister, Donna Catalina, will be most happy to entertain the preservers of her brother,—three cavaliers who draw their swords for the freedom of Spain."

"Certainly, Don Alvaro, we should be sorry to slight your offer," said the major. "A comfortable quarter is a scarce matter in Spain just now; and if Donna Catalina will not be incommoded by three *soldados* billeting themselves upon her mansion without notice, we are very much at your service. When I was in Egypt in 1801, I remember an adventure just such as—"

"Take care of the curb, major," cried Ronald, as the bulky field-officer tripped against the side of the pavement.

"Just such as this. We were quartered at—"

"Grand Cairo," interrupted Ronald ruthlessly, for he disliked the repetition of long stories, which was a failing of the worthy major's, who lugged in Egypt and Sir Ralph Abercrombie on all occasions. "Ay, I remember the story, and a capital one it is! But here is Don Alvaro's house."

As he spoke, they halted before a large mansion, ornamented with lofty columns and broad balconies, upon which the tall windows opened: through the curtains bright rays of light streamed into the dark street. Alvaro applied his hand to the large knocker hanging on the entrance door, which appeared more like the portal of a prison than that of an hidalgo's residence, being low, arched, and studded with iron nails.

"*Quien es?*" said a voice within.

"*Gente de paz!*" replied Alvaro, while the light from the passage flashed through a little panel which was drawn aside, and through which they were cautiously scrutinized.

The door was immediately opened by an aged and wrinkled female servant, whose bright black eyes contrasted strangely with her skin, which was shrivelled and yellow as an old drum-head. Old Dame Agnes, lamp in hand, led them along a passage, up a broad wooden staircase, and into a noble and spacious apartment, which displayed the usual combination of elegance and discomfort, so common in the houses of Spanish nobles. The ceiling presented beautifully painted panels, and a gorgeous cornice of gilt stucco, supported by pilasters of the Corinthian order; while the floor from which they rose was composed of large square red tiles. Four large casements looked towards the Plaza; they were glazed with glass,—a luxury in Spain, but their shutters were rough deal boards, which were barely concealed by the rich white curtains overhanging them: the furniture was oak,—massive, clumsy, and old as the days of Don Quixote. Upon the panels of the ceiling, the bases of the pillars, and other places, appeared the blazonry of coats armorial, displaying the alliances of the family of Villa Franca.

On the table, beside a guitar, castanets, music-books, &c., stood a

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large silver candelabrum, bearing four tall candles, the flames of which flickered in the currents of air flowing through many a chink and cranny, as if to remind the three British officers that it was at home only that true comfort was to be found. Heat was diffused through the room by means of a pan of glowing charcoal placed in the centre of the floor, and a lady, who sat with her feet resting upon it in the Spanish manner, rose at their entrance.

CHAPTER IX.

DONNA CATALINA.

"Down from her head the long fair tresses flow,
And sport with lovely negligence below.
The waving ribands, which her buskins tie,
Her snowy skin with waving purple dye;
As crimson veils, in palaces displayed,
To the white marble lend a blushing shade."

Ovid's Metamorphoses.

As she stood erect, her velvet mantilla fell from her white shoulders, displaying a round and exquisitely moulded form, tall and full, yet light and graceful. The noble contour of her head, and the delicate outline of her features, were shown by the removal of her black lace veil, which she threw back, permitting it to hang sweeping down behind, giving her that stately and dignified air so common to the Spanish ladies, but of which our own are so deficient, owing, probably, to the extreme stiffness of their head-dress. Her skin was fair, exceedingly so for a Spaniard; but the glossy curls of the deepest black falling on her neck, rendered it yet more so by contrast. Her crimson lips and the fine form of her nostrils, her white transparent brow and full dark eyes, shining with inexpressible brilliance, struck the three Scots mute with surprise,—almost with awe. So showy a beauty had not met their gaze since their departure from Edinburgh, and even Ronald, while keeping his hand within the breast of his coat upon the miniature of Alice, felt his heart beneath it strangely moved at the sight of the fair Spaniard.

"Don Alvaro, I think you might have spent with me the only night you have been in Merida for this year past," said the young lady pouting prettily.

"Nay, my dear Catalina, you must not receive us thus," replied her brother in Spanish, her knowledge of English being very slight. "Allow me to introduce three British officers, to whom I am indebted for the preservation of my life, which six bravoes, employed by old Salvador de Zagala put in imminent peril to-night."

"Ah! you have been at your old affair,—you have been visiting the Calle de San Juan. How often have I warned you! Well, and the bravoes?"

"One has been sent to purgatory to-night, and another shall be sent somewhere else by daybreak." On Catalina hearing the story, she thanked, in broken English, but in a voice of thrilling earnestness, the three wearied soldados, who had seated themselves on the large old-fashioned chairs, the crimson leather and gilding of which showed them to be the work of the previous century.

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"You must excuse, senors," said Catalina, "the very poor fare I have to present you with. The French *ladrones* carried off almost everything with them this morning, and Merida will not soon forget their visit."

"Our fare, thanks to the lazy commissariat department, has been so hard of late, that almost anything will pass muster with us," replied Ronald; "but here are dishes enough for a whole troop." While he spoke, the oak table was laid in a twinkling with a variety of covers; of which they could scarcely taste any, owing to the garlic and olive-oil with which the Spaniards, as well as the Portuguese, always season and cook up their victuals.

"You do not seem to relish the pigeon, *senor mio*," said Donna Catalina to the major, who was making wry faces at every mouthful he took. "Try the piece of cold roasted meat on the cover near you."

"I thank you," answered Campbell, helping himself largely. "It would be excellent to my taste, was it not for the olive-oil and spices, not used in our country, with which it is seasoned."

A hash and ragout were likewise attempted, but in vain; the garlic with which they were dressed rendered it impossible for the three strangers to taste them, but it was equally impossible to be displeased: the polite apologies and regrets of the cavalier, and the condescending sweetness of his beautiful sister, made ample amends. But the three hungry Scots were very well pleased to see the first course replaced by the second, which consisted of white Spanish bread of the purest flour, dried grapes, and several large crystal jugs of the purple country wine, sherry, and Malaga.

"You British are rather more fastidious than our Portuguese friends and allies," said Alvaro, laughing. "The last time the 6th Caçadores lay quartered here, they left not a single cat uneaten,—a loss still remembered with peculiar animosity by the housewives of Merida. The Portuguese are not over nice in anything, certainly, and we have a proverb among us, 'that a bad Spaniard makes a good Portuguese.'"

"Sir, when I am sharp-set, I am not very apt to be particular myself," replied Campbell. "When I was in Egypt with Sir Ralph, on one occasion I ate a very juicy steak cut from a horse's flank, and fried in a camp-kettle lid. We were starving for want of rations, senor; and, I dare say, even the holy camel on its way to Mecca, had it passed our route, would have been gobbled up, hump and all."

Ronald, who had hitherto sat almost silent, began to dread a long Egyptian story from the major; but this fear was removed by Don Alvaro's filling up his horn, and drinking to the health of Lord Wellington and the British forces, the deliverers of Spain and Ferdinand the Seventh.

After this complimentary toast had been duly honoured, "A bumper, gentleman!" exclaimed the major; "fill up your glasses—regular brimmers, and they must be drunk off with true Highland honours. *A la libertad de Espana!* hurrah!" and, springing up erect with native agility, the three Scots, placing their left feet on their seats and their right on the table (a movement which considerably surprised the grave don and his sister, who trembled for her crimson chairs), they flourished their glasses aloft, and drank to the toast with what are called *Highland honours*.

"*Viva! viva!*" cried the cavalier, in applause of the sentiment, though rather puzzled at the mode of proclaiming it.

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They drank to their fair hostess, and to all sorts of gallant and martial toasts; and, as the wine-horns were filled and emptied again and again, they grew more merry, the national gravity of the don disappearing gradually as their conviviality increased. He laughed and sung with the frankness of a soldier, and trolled forth more than once the "Song of Five Hundred Horse," a Spanish military carol. At Ronald's request, Catalina took her guitar from the back of her chair where it hung, and, without requiring the entreaties necessary to obtain the same favour from a British lady, the frank girl sung with a coquettish air, which peculiarly became her, "My Mother wants no Soldiers here," a song well known in Spain at the time our troops were campaigning there.

"She seems bent on making a conquest of you, Alister," whispered Ronald.

"Of yourself, rather," retorted the other, coldly. Indeed, Macdonald had said but little all night; his mind was continually wandering to the recent fray, and the remembrance that he had for the first time slain a fellow-being,—a reflection which troubled him very little, truly, a few weeks afterwards, when he had become used to that sort of work. "Of yourself, rather, Stuart. Her eyes are ever on you, and—"

"Hush! she hears us," replied the other, hurriedly, his cheek reddening, yet more with mental shame than anger. "O, Alice Lisle!" thought he, "this Spaniard, beautiful as she is, cannot surely be teaching me to forget you so soon. Her eyes are blacker than those of Alice, certainly, but they are less soft and feminine,—less gentle in expression; yet—" Here he was interrupted by the loud and sonorous voice of Campbell, who, at the request of Catalina, was commencing a song.

Ronald was rapidly becoming so confused with the effects of the wine he had taken, that he knew not whether it was Alice Lisle or Donna Catalina who sat beside him; but having a vague idea that it was some beautiful female, before the major's song was ended he was making downright love, which the lady took in very good humour.

Campbell's song, the

"Piobracht-an Donuil-dhu,"

although it roused the hearts of his countrymen by its martial and forcible language, was listened to with a grave and pleasant smile by Don Alvaro, who, of course, comprehended not one word of the ditty, which in his ears sounded as a most barbarous jargon, and might have been a Moorish battle-song for aught that he knew to the contrary.

The retiring of Donna Catalina did not put an end to the carousal; and, as they had to leave Merida an hour before daybreak, they betook themselves to rest (after every jug of wine had been discussed), on the chairs, as it was useless to go to bed for an hour or two only. The short time they passed in slumber flew quickly, and they were soon roused by the din of the flying-artillery guns, as they swept over the causewayed streets, driven at a hard trot towards the bridge of Merida.

"*Caramba!* Rouse, senors," cried Alvaro, who was the first to awake.

"*Carajo!* Ay, there go the field-pieces: old Rowland's in his saddle already," muttered the major, scrambling up from the floor on

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which he had rolled in the night-time, and placing his large bonnet on the wrong way, permitting the long feathers to stream down his back. "Rouse, gentlemen! Up and be doing, sirs, or we shall be missed from our posts. Old Mahoud take the rule for marching before daybreak! Sir Ralph never made us do so in Egypt, and we gained laurels there, gentlemen—I say we did. This infernal bonnet! 'tis always falling off."

"I wish to Heaven I could sleep an hour longer!" said Ronald. "I have scarcely had three hours' sleep this week past."

"Our brigade never sleep, gentlemen," cried Campbell, who was still a little inebriated, "never! We march all night, and fight all day: we used to reverse the matter in Egypt. But what have we here? Peter Forbes—or what is your name, what's the matter? Are Dombrouski's dragoons among ye?"

"*Ave Maria! O Dios mio! O Senor Don Alvaro!*" cried Sargento Pedro Gomez, appearing at the entrance of the room with a lamp in his hand; "we have had the devil among us last night."

"How so, fellow? What has happened?"

"The bravo has escaped—"

"How! Diavolo, escaped?"

"Ay, noble senor, and carried off the carbine of poor Diego de la Zarza, whom we found lying within the chamber with his throat cut from ear to ear."

The cavalier ground his teeth with absolute fury, while his olive cheek grew black with rising passion.

"*Santos! Santissimus!*" cried he; "would to San Juan, and all the calendar, I had hanged him last night! My brave Diego,—but he must have slept; if so, he deserves his fate. Well, there is no help for this matter; we will give Narvaez Cifuentes a short prayer and a long stab the next time we meet, and that without delay. But we must be off; the cavalry advance-guard, and part of the artillery, have already passed. Let the *trompetero* sound 'to horse;' and hasten, Pedro, and get the troop into their saddles. Though we belong to the division of Murillo, we will cross the bridge with you to-day, senors, and strike a blow for honour. *Viva Espana y buena Esperanza!* 'Tis a better war-shout than the *Vive l'Empereur* of the followers of the perfidious Buonaparte."

"There are the drums of our brigade," said Ronald Stuart; "and should we be missed by Fassifern, the excellency of Don Alvaro's purple Malaga and sherry, or even the smiles of Donna Catalina herself, would form but a poor excuse for lingering. Hark! the *générale*."

"You improve in the art of gallantry," observed Macdonald; "you could not have turned such fine speeches the morning we halted in the Black Horse-square, at Lisbon. But I regret that we must march without bidding adieu to our fair *patrona*."

"Forward, cavaliers; Catalina will excuse our departing without bidding her farewell. Down the stair-case to the left, senors," cried Alvaro. "Pedro Gomez, knave, light the way!" and they pressed forward into the street, feeling the chill air of the morning blow strangely on their faces, while their heads swam with the fumes of the wine taken so lately.

"It will be long ere I forget the night we spent in Merida," said Macdonald.

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"And long ere I do so, truly," replied Stuart, casting his eyes vacantly over the dark windows of the mansion of Villa Franca.

"Ah!—Donna Catalina; are you looking for her?"

"Such strange scenes of fray and other matters! Had such a row occurred at home, all Britain would have rung with it, from Dover to Cape Wrath; but here it is as nothing."

"Hark! what is that, Stuart?"

"A cry—by Heaven, a most appalling one!" A loud shriek arose from amid the darkness in which the Plaza was involved. They hastened to that part of the square from whence it appeared to issue, and found that the conflict in which they had borne so conspicuous a part was not the only outrage committed that night in Merida. They discovered a young Portuguese lad, the private servant of Lieutenant-colonel Macdonald, of the Gordon Highlanders, lying dead under the piazzas, stabbed to the heart with a long stiletto or knife, and the assassin was never discovered.

For some hours the dark streets of the city rang to the measured tramp of marching soldiers, the clatter of accoutrements, the clang of hoofs, and the rumble of heavy wheels, as artillery, cavalry, and infantry, moved rapidly forward; but by sunrise the whole division had crossed the bridge, and on the opposite side of the river pursued their route towards Almendralejo.

"Colonel Cameron!" cried old Wemyss, the brigade-major, cantering up to the head of the column, "Major-general Howard requests that you will increase your front. It is Sir Rowland's order."

"Form sub-divisions!" cried Fassifern, in the loud and manly tone of authority which so well became him. "Rear sections, left oblique—double quick!" The order was obeyed along the whole column by each regiment in succession. Their fine brass bands filled the air with martial music, causing every heart to vibrate to the sharp sound of the soul-stirring trumpet, the cymbals, and trombone. The horses shook their manes,—their riders sat more erect; the waving colours were flung forward on the breeze above the steel ridges of glittering bayonets, and the brave hearts of those who marched beneath them grew light and animated at the prospect of a brush with the enemy. Their starving condition, their faded uniform, the discomfort of the last night's bivouac, were forgotten,—all was military, gay and exciting to the utmost, filling every bosom with the pride of the profession and the fervent "glow of chivalry." Sir Rowland Hill, with his staff, viewed from a little eminence the whole length of the column of that division of the army under his command, as they passed, and a pleasing smile animated the benevolent features of the bluff old general, when he beheld the willingness with which the footsore and almost shoeless soldiers pressed forward, although they had endured all that could render troops, less persevering and disciplined, less hardy and less brave, mutinous.

Toilsome forced marches—shelterless bivouacs, starvation, receiving no provisions sometimes for three consecutive days,—no clothing, and almost ever in arrears of pay—on one occasion for six months,—nothing but the hope of a change, and the redoubtable spirit which animated them, could have supported the British soldiers under the accumulation of miseries suffered by them in the Peninsula,—miseries which were lessened to the French troops, by their living at free quarters wherever they went.

These things, however, were forgotten for the present time, and with

others Ronald Stuart felt all the ardour which the display before him and the fineness of the morning were calculated to inspire. The bright sun shone from an unclouded sky, filling the clear blue vault with warmth; the birds were chirping and hopping merrily among the dewy branches of the olive thickets and dark laurel-bushes overhanging the broad path, the deep dingles on each side of which echoed to the notes of the sounding music.

Ronald looked back to the flat-roofed mansions and Roman ruins of Merida, on the grey walls of which, casting bold shadows, streamed the full splendour of the morning sun. The cavalry rear-guard were slowly crossing the ancient bridge, and with the red coats came the brown uniform of Spain: it was the troop of Don Alvaro advancing, with their polished helmets and tall lances flashing in the sun, and finding a sparkling reflection in the deep blue current of the Guadiana below.

Ronald carried for the first time the regimental colour, which bore evident marks of service, being pierced in many places by musket-shot. It was a laborious affair to sustain, especially during a breeze, being large, and of rich yellow silk, fringed round with bullion. The sphinx, —the badge of Egypt (the pride of the major's heart), surrounded by a wreath of the brave old thistle, and the honourable mottoes "*Egmont-op-Zee*," "*Mandora*," and "*Bergen-op-Zoom*,"* all sewn, as usual, by fair hands, and done in massive gold embroidery,—appeared in the centre of the standard, which the Duchess of Gordon had presented to the clan regiment of her son.

"Stuart, I see you are casting longing looks back to Merida," said Alister in his usual jesting manner, as he marched by Ronald's side with the gaudy king's colour sloped on his shoulder. "There is some attraction in our rear, I perceive; you are ever looking that way."

"Ay, yonder comes Don Alvaro and his troop of lances; how gallant they appear! But they are almost hidden in the dust raised by the rear of the column."

"Look above the colours of the 71st, and you will see the roof which contains the fair Catalina; it was for that you were searching so narrowly. I can read your thoughts, you see, without being a conjurer. Stuart, my boy, you are very green in these matters, otherwise you would not blush as scarlet as your coat, which, by the bye, is rapidly becoming purple."

"What stuff you talk, Macdonald! What is Catalina to me?"

"Pshaw! now you need not bristle up so fiercely. Were you not making downright love to her last night? And the Don himself would have seen it, but had drunk too much Malaga."

"Impossible, Alister! You must dream, or this is some of your usual nonsense. I have no recollection of speaking to Donna Catalina otherwise than I would have done to any lady—and Campbell heard me."

"The major had over much sherry under his belt, and made too much noise about Egypt,—the pyramids,—Pompey's pillar,—the battle of Alexandria, and Heaven knows all what, to hear any one speaking but himself. We spent the night in glorious style, however; but the taste of that horrible garlic—Heavens above! what is this?"

* Such, with many additions, are still the badges of the Gordon Highlanders. For the information of unmilitary readers, I may state, that every corps has two colours,—a king's and regimental; the first carried by the senior, and the latter by the junior ensign.

Alister's sudden exclamation was not given without sufficient reason. A carbine flashed from among the dark evergreens which overhung the road, and Ronald Stuart, staggering backwards, fell prostrate and bleeding at the feet of his comrades, from whom burst a wild shout of rage and surprise; but the strictness of British discipline prevented any man from moving in search of the assassin.

"Hell's fury!" cried Colonel Cameron, spurring his horse to the spot, while his eyes shot fire. "Search the bushes; forward, men! Do not fire, in case of alarming the rear of the column; but fix bayonets,—slay, hew, and cut to pieces whoever you find."

With mingled curses and shouts, a hundred Highlanders dashed through the thicket; but their heavy knapsacks and the tall plumes of their bonnets impeded their movements in piercing the twisted and tangled branches of the thickly-leaved laurels. They searched the grove through and through, beating the bushes in every direction; but no trace of the assassin was found, save a broad-brimmed *sombrero* bearing the figure of the Virgin stamped in pewter, fastened to the band encircling it, which Alister Macdonald found near a gigantic laurel-bush, in the midst of the umbrageous branches of which its owner lurked unseen.

"It is the hat of Cifuentes,—the vagabond of our last night's adventure," said Alister, hewing a passage through the bushes with his sword, and regaining the regiment.

"I would you had brought his head rather. O that it was within the reach of my trusty stick! I would scorn to wet Andrea with his base blood." A frown of rage contracted the broad brow of Campbell while he spoke, holding in one hand a steel Highland pistol, which he had drawn from his holsters for the purpose of executing dire vengeance had opportunity offered.

"By all the powers above!" cried Alister, with fierce and stern energy, "if ever this accursed Spaniard crosses my path, I will make his head fly from his shoulders as I would a thistle from its stalk! nor shall all the corregidors and alcaldes in Spain prevent me. But how is Stuart? Poor fellow! he looks very pale. Has he lost much blood?"

Ronald, supported on the arm of Evan Iverach, stood erect within a circle formed by the officers who crowded round, while one of the regimental surgeons examined his left arm, which had been wounded by the shot.

"O gude sake! be gentle wi' him, doctor!" said honest Evan in great anguish, as he observed Ronald to wince under the hands of the medical officer; "be as gentle wi' him as possible. You doctor folk are unco rough ever and aye: dinna forget that he is your namesake, and kinsman forbye, though ye canna find out the exact degree."

"I hope, Doctor Stuart, the wound is not a very bad one?" said Cameron, dismounting from his horse and approaching the circle. "I augur ill from the expression of concern which your countenance wears."

"The shot has passed completely through, colonel, breaking the bone in its passage; but as the fracture is not compound, it will soon join after setting. I hope that none of the red coat, or any other foreign body, is lodged in the wound."

"Oh, if it should be a poisoned ball!" groaned poor Evan in great misery at the idea, while Doctor Stuart removed the sleeve of the coat, and Ronald endeavoured to conceal the miniature of Alice Lisle, which

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was nearly revealed by the disarrangement of his uniform. "Oh, if it should be a poisoned ball!" he repeated.

"Some of our very best chields have been slain wi' them before now,—especially at the battle of Arroya-del-Molino," observed his comrade Angus Mackie, with a solemn shake of his head.

"Oh, that I had only been at his side! It micht have hit me in his stead!"

"Silence, men! You chatter nonsense," said Cameron sternly. "And what think you now, doctor?"

"That as Mr. Stuart is young, and of a full habit, I must bleed him immediately."

"Stuff! My good fellow, he has lost blood enough already."

"*I* am the best judge of that, Colonel Cameron," replied Esculapius haughtily; "delay is fraught with danger. Holloa, there! where's the hospital attendant? Serjeant Maconush, undo the service-case and bring me the pasteboard splints, the twelve-tailed bandage, and other et cæteras: I will set the bone."

"It is impossible, Doctor Stuart," interposed Cameron. "Your intentions are all very good; but your clansman must return to Merida, where I sincerely hope he will be properly attended to. We have no time to await your operations just now, for which I am truly sorry, as Ensign Stuart will be well aware."

"Do not mind me, colonel," replied Ronald, whose teeth were clenched with the agony he endured. "I will return as you say, and shall doubtless find a medical attendant. I hear the rear regiments are clamorous at this stoppage in their front, and yonder is Sir Rowland himself, advancing to discover the cause." He spoke with difficulty, and at intervals; the new and painful sensation of a broken limb, together with rage swelling his heart at the manner in which he had received it, made his utterance low and indistinct. Among the group around him he recognized Don Alvaro, who had galloped from the rear to discover the meaning of the confusion.

"*Senor coronel,*" said he to Cameron, raising his hand to the peak of his helmet, "let him be taken to my house in Merida, where he will be properly attended to. Pedro Gomez,"—turning to his orderly serjeant,—"dismount. Give this cavalier your horse, and attend him yourself to my residence in the Calle de Guadiana, and desire Donna Catalina to have his wound looked after. You will remain with him until it is healed."

Pedro sprung lightly from his saddle, into which Ronald was with some difficulty installed.

"I thank you, senor," said Cameron, touching his bonnet, "and am glad this disagreeable matter is so satisfactorily arranged; the alcalde might have ordered him but an indifferent billet. Good by, my dear fellow, Stuart; I trust we shall see you soon again, and with a whole skin. Mr. Grant, take the colours. Gentlemen, fall in; get into your places, men—into your ranks. Forward!" He delivered his orders with firm rapidity, and being a strict martinet, who was not to be trifled with, they were instantly obeyed, and the commotion was hushed. The troops were too much accustomed to wounds and slaughter to care about the hurt received by Ronald; but it was the sudden and concealed shot which had raised their surprise and indignation.

Evan Iverach alone delayed executing the orders of Cameron, and

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entreated that he might be permitted to attend his wounded master to the rear.

"My good fellow, it cannot be," replied the colonel, pleased with the genuine concern manifested by Ronald's honest follower; "the enemy are before us, and I cannot spare a man. Nay, now, you need not entreat; fall into your place at once, sir."

"Oh! if you please, sir, dinna speak sae sternly. Did ye but ken—"

"Into your place this instant, sir! or I will have you stripped of your accoutrements, and sent prisoner to the quarter-guard," exclaimed Cameron sternly, his eyes beginning to sparkle. To say more was useless, and shouldering his musket with a heavy heart, Evan took his place in the ranks, and moved forward with the rest; but he cast many an anxious look to the rear, watching the retiring figure of Ronald as he sat on the troop-horse, which was led by Pedro Gomez towards the bridge of Merida.

CHAPTER X.

FLIRTATION.

"Oh! the sunny peaches glow,
And the grapes in clusters blush;
And the cooling silver streams
From their sylvan fountains rush.
There is music in the grove,
And there's fragrance on the gale;
But there's nought so dear to me,
As my own Highland vale."

Vedder's Poems.

Ronald experienced most intense pain, together with a cold, benumbed feeling in the fractured limb; but it was as nothing in comparison to the mental torture which he endured, or the indignant and fierce thoughts that animated his heart. He entertained a deep and concentrated hatred of the wretch who, aiming thus maliciously and savagely at his life, had in so daring a manner inflicted a wound by which he might ultimately lose his arm, and which, for the present, disabled him from accompanying his comrades, who were rapidly following up the retreating foe, and eager to engage.

As his regiment belonged to the first brigade of the division, it consequently marched in front, or near the head of the column, and in his return to Merida he had to pass nearly 16,000 men; and the bitterness of his feelings was increased at the idea that every man there would probably share the honour of an engagement, of which his mutilated state forbade him to be a participator. Solemn and deep were the inward vows he took, to seek dire vengeance for this morning's work on Narvaez Cifuentes, if ever he again confronted him; and his only fear was, that he might never meet with him more.

From the bridge of Merida he cast a farewell look after his comrades, but nought could he see, save a long and dense cloud of dust, through which the glitter of polished steel and the waving fold of a standard appeared at times, as the extended length of the marching column wound its way up the gentle eminence, above which appeared the top of the spire of Almendralejo, several leagues distant.

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By Pedro Gomez he was conducted to the stately mansion of Don Alvaro, and delivered over to the tender care of Donna Catalina, whose softest sympathies were awakened when the young officer was brought back to her scarcely able to speak, and his gay uniform covered with blood, for he had lost a great quantity, owing to the hasty manner in which his namesake, the surgeon, had bound up the wound. Add to this, that he was a handsome youth,—a soldier who had come to fight for Spain, and had but yesternight rescued her brother from death: the young lady's interest, gratitude, and pity were all enlisted in his favour. Her large dark eyes sparkled with mingled sorrow and pleasure when she beheld him,—sorrow at the pain he suffered, and pleasure at the happiness of being his nurse and enjoying his society in a mansion of which she was absolute mistress, and where there was no old maiden aunt or duenna to be a spy upon her, or overruler of her movements; and as for the scandal of Merida, or quizzing of her female companions, she was resolved not to care a straw,—she was above the reach of either. Her uncle, the Prior of San Juan, resided in the mansion, but the worthy old padre was so enlarged in circumference by ease and good living, and so crippled by the gout, that he never moved further than from his bed to the well-bolstered chair in which he sat all day, and from the chair back to bed again, and no one ever entered his room save old Dame Agnes (already mentioned), who alone seemed to possess the power of pleasing him; consequently he was never seen by the other inhabitants of the house, any more than if he did not exist.

We will pass over the account of the bone-setting by the Padre Mendizabal, the famous medical practitioner in Merida, who nearly drove Ronald mad by an oration on different sorts of fractures, simple and compound, and the different treatment requisite for the cure of various gun-shot wounds, before his arm was splinted and bandaged up. Weak and exhausted from the loss of blood, and his head buzzing with Mendizabal's discourse, right glad was Ronald when he found himself in a comfortable and splendid couch,—Catalina's own, which she had resigned for his use as the best in the house,—with its curtains drawn round for the night; and he forgot, in a dreamy and uneasy slumber, the exciting passages of the last few days, the danger of his wound, and the sunny eyes of the donna.

The tolling bells of a neighbouring steeple awakened him early next morning, and brought his mind back to the world, and a long chain of disagreeable thoughts.

There is scarcely anything which makes one feel so much from home as the sound of a strange church bell; and the deep and hollow ding-dong which rung from the Gothic steeple of San Juan was very different from the merry rattle of the well-known kirk bell at Lochisla. Ronald thought of that village bell, and the noble peasantry whom it was wont to call to prayer, and the association brought a gush of fond and sad recollections into his mind. He felt himself, as it were, deserted in a strange country,—among a people of whose language he knew almost nothing; he looked round him, and his apartment appeared strange and foreign,—every object it presented was new and peculiar to his eye. He thought of Scotland—of HOME,—home with all its ten thousand dear and deeply impressed associations, until he wept like a child, and his mind became a prey to the most profound and intense dejection,—suffering from the home-sickness, an acuteness and agony of feeling which only those can know who have been so unhappy as to

experience this amiable feeling; one which exists all-powerfully in the hearts of the Scots, who, although great travellers and wanderers from home, ever turn their thoughts, fondly and sadly, to the lofty mountains, the green forests, and the rushing rivers which they first beheld when young, and to the grassy sod that covers the dust of their warrior ancestors, and which they wish to cover their own, when they follow them "to the land of the leal."

The feverish state of his body had communicated itself to his mind, and for several days and nights, in the solitude of his chamber, he brooded over the memory of his native place, enduring the acuteness of the nostalgia in no small degree; and even the fair Catalina, with her songs, her guitar, and her castanets, failed to enliven him, at least for a time; his whole pleasure—and a gloomy pleasure it was—being to brood over the memory of his far-off home. The dreams that haunted the broken slumbers which the pain of his wound permitted him to snatch, served but to increase the disorder; and often, from a pleasing vision of his paternal tower with its mountain loch and pathless pine forests, of his white-haired sire as he last beheld him, or of Alice Lisle smiling and beautiful, with her bright eyes and curling tresses, twining her arms endearingly round him, and laying her soft cheek to his, he was awakened by some confounded circumstance, which again brought on him the painful and soul-absorbing lethargy which weighed down every faculty, rendering him careless of every present object, save the miniature of Alice. The paleness of his complexion, and the intense sadness of his eye, puzzled his medical attendant, Doctor Mendizabal, but neither to him nor to Donna Catalina, who used the most bewitching entreaties, would the forlorn young soldier confess the cause of his dejection,—concealment of the mental feelings from others being a concomitant of the disease. So each formed their own opinions. Mendizabal concluded it to be loss of blood; and the lady, after consulting her cousin and companion, Inesella de Truxillo, supposed that he must unquestionably be in love,—what else could render so handsome an *officiale* so very sad?

This conclusion gave him additional interest with her; and certes, Alice Lisle would little have admired the attendance upon Ronald's sick couch of a rival, and one so dangerously beautiful; but her fears might have decreased, had she seen how incessantly, during the days he was confined to his bed, he gazed upon the little miniature which Louis Lisle had given as a parting gift. Concealing it from the view of others, he watched it with untiring eyes, until, in the fervency of his fancy, the features seemed to become animated and expanded,—the sparkling eyes to fill with light and tenderness,—the pale cheek to flush, and the dark curls which fell around it to wave,—the coral lips to smile; while he almost imagined that he heard the soft murmurs of her voice mingling with the gurgle of the Isla and the rustle of the foliage on the banks, where they were wont to play and gambol in infancy.

In a few days, however, his mental and bodily languor disappeared, and when, by the surgeon's advice, he left his sick chamber, his usual lightness of heart returned rapidly, and he was soon able to promenade under the piazzas of the Plaza with Catalina during the fine sunny evenings; and although the miniature was not less admired than formerly, the fair original would have trembled could she have witnessed all the nursing which Ronald received from his beautiful patrona, and heard all the soft things which were uttered.

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As his strength increased, their strolls were extended, and the young

ladies of Merida smiled at each other, and shook their heads significantly, as the graceful donna, attired in her veil and mantilla, swept through the great stradi, flirting her little fan, with the foreign *officiale* in the plumed bonnet and rich scarlet uniform. His fair patrona showed him all the remains of Roman magnificence in Merida, and Ronald, who, like most of his countrymen, was an enthusiastic admirer of the gloomy and antique, explored every cranny and nook of the immense ruins of the once important castle; surveying with a sad feeling the pillared halls which once had rung to the sound of the trumpet and the clashing harness of Spanish chivalry, but where now the ivy hung down from the roofless wall, and the long grass grew between the squares of the tessellated pavement. Time had reduced it to little more than a heap of shattered stones, but it was as ancient, probably, as the days of the Goths, during whose dominion a strong garrison lay at Merida.

The large amphitheatre, of which the citizens are so proud, formed another attraction, and its circular galleries were the scene of many an evening walk with Catalina and her cousin Inesella of Truxillo, a very gay and very beautiful girl, with whom a great deal of laughing and flirting ensued in clambering up the steep stone seats, and rambling through its maze of arcades, arched passages, projecting galleries, and the long dark dens opening on the arena.

The Roman baths of Diana, a subterranean edifice of an oval form, containing ranges of dressing-chambers, and a large stone bathing-basin filled with pure water, formed another object of interest; and many were the pleasant strolls they enjoyed along the grassy banks of the Guadiana and by the summit of a high hill (the name of which I have forgotten), in the shade of the broad trellis, where the vines were bursting into leaf, and in every green lane and embowered walk about Merida, even to the hermitage of San Bartolomi,* where a white-bearded anchorite showed them the boiling-hot spring of Alange.

During this intercourse, Ronald rapidly improved in his Spanish; and who would not have done so under the tuition of such fair instructresses? He found it

> "— pleasing to be school'd in a strange tongue
> By female lips and eyes—that is, I mean,
> When both the teacher and the taught are young,
> As was the case, at least, where I have been;
> They smile so when one's right, and when one's wrong
> They smile still more; and then there intervene
> Pressure of hands, perhaps even a chaste kiss:—
> I learn'd the little that I know by this."

More than one week had slipped away, and Ronald had nearly recovered from his wound, though still obliged to keep his arm slung in a scarf. In the garden at the back of the mansion, he was seated by Catalina's side one evening on the steps of a splendid fountain, where four brazen deities spouted the crystal liquid from their capacious throats into a broad basin of black marble, from which, by some subterraneous passage, it was carried to the Guadiana. The spring was now advanced, and the delightful climate of Spain was fast arraying nature, and bringing her forth in all her glory. From the fountain, broad gravelled walks, thickly edged with myrtle, branched off in every direction, and between them were beds where the crimson gera-

* A place three leagues eastward of Merida.

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nium, the gigantic rose-bushes, the pale lilac blossom, and a thousand other garden flowers, which it would be useless to mention, were budding in the heat of the vernal sun by day, and in the soft moist dews by night. Around and above them the graceful willow, the tufted acacia, the stately palm, the orange-tree with its singularly beautiful leaves, and numerous other shrubs, were spreading into foliage, which appeared to increase daily in richness of tint and variety; and beautiful vistas, winding walks, and umbrageous bowers, were formed among them with all the art and nicety of Spanish landscape gardening.

The young Highlander and Catalina were seated on the margin of the fountain, as I have already said. They conversed but little. The donna busied herself with the strings of her guitar, and Ronald watched in silence the nimble motions of her white hands as she tied and untied, screwed and unscrewed the strings and pegs, and struck the chords to ascertain the true tone. Strange and conflicting thoughts flitted through his mind while he gazed upon his beautiful companion. He was aware how dangerous to his peace her presence was, and he almost longed for, yet dreaded the coming time, when he should be obliged to return to his regiment. To Alice Lisle he felt that he was bound by every tie that early intimacy, love, and honour, could twine around him,—honour! how could he think of so cold a word? and while he did so, he blushed that he could find room in his heart for the image of another.

"Catalina is very beautiful—decidedly so," thought he, while he viewed the curve of her white neck, and the outline of her superb bust. "Her face is one of surpassing loveliness, and her eyes—but Alice is equally bewitching, although perhaps a less showy beauty. Alice is very gentle and winning, so lady-like, and we have known each other so long—it is impossible I can forget her. Why, then, have I been trifling with one whose presence is so dangerous to my peace? Yes! if I would preserve a whole heart and my allegiance to Alice, I must fly from you, Catalina."

While he reasoned thus with himself, Catalina raised her dark and laughing eyes to his, while she struck the chords of her instrument, and sang a few words of a very beautiful Spanish air. So melodious was her tone, so graceful her manner, so winning the expression of eye, who can wonder that Ronald's resolution melted like snow in the sunshine, and that he felt himself vanquished? Poor Alice! With an air of tenderness and embarrassment he took the little hand of the donna within his own. She read in his eye the thoughts which passed through his mind; she cast down her long jetty lashes, while a rich bloom suffused her soft cheek. Ronald was about to murmur forth something—in fact, he knew not what, when a loud knocking at the outer gate of the mansion, and the sound of a well-known voice, aroused him.

"Unbar the yett—this instant! ye auld doited gomeral! I will see my maister in spite o' ye," cried Evan impatiently, while Agnes delayed unbarring the door to so boisterous a visitor.

"*Caramba, senor! Quien es?*" she repeated.

"Gude wife, I speak nae language but my ain; so ye needna waste your wind by speirin' questions that I canna answer."

At Ronald's desire, the old housekeeper undid the door, which was well secured by many a bar and lock, and he immediately saw the waving plumes of Evan's bonnet dancing above the shrubbery, as he

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came hastily towards the fountain, with his musket at the long trail, and his uniform and accoutrements covered with the dust of a long day's march. His joy was unbounded on seeing his master, and rapid and quick were the earnest inquiries he made, without waiting for answers, concerning his wound, and how he had been treated "by the unco folk he had been left to bide amang,—begging the bonnie leddy's pardon."

Catalina bowed,—although she knew not a word that he said; but by the natural politeness and expression of the soldier's look, she knew that he referred to her.

"Now then, Evan, that I have answered all your inquiries, be pleased to stand steady, and moderate yourself so far as to reply to *mine*," said Ronald kindly, far from feeling annoyed at his appearance at a juncture so peculiarly awkward and tender. "How come you here just now? and how alone?"

"I got leave frae the colonel, after an unco dunning, to come here and attend you, for I thocht you would feel yersel unco queer, left alane among the black-avised folk, that canna speak a decent tongue. But here, sir, is a letter and a newspaper, sent you by Maister Macdonald." Evan, after fumbling among the ration biscuits, shoe-brushes, and other matters which crammed his havresack, produced them. "Just as I cam awa' frae the place whar' the regiment lay, in dreary strath—a place like Corris-oich for a' the world—seventy miles frae this, I heard that the order had come to retire to the rear—"

"Upon Merida?"

"I canna say, sir, because the very moment that Cameron gied me leave, and Maister Macdonald gied me his letter, I set off, and have travelled nicht and day, without stopping, except may be just for an hour, to sleep by the road-side or to get a mouthfu o' meat,—trash sic as ane wadna gie to puir auld Hector the watch-dog at hame, at auld Lochisla. O it was a far and a weary gait; but I was sae anxious to see ye, sir, that I have trod it out in twa days, in heavy marching order as ye see me, and I am like to dee wi' sheer fatigue."

"You are a faithful fellow, Evan; but I fear, by your love for me, you may work mischief to yourself. Here comes Dame Agnes,—to her care I must consign you. She was a kind attendant to me when I much wanted one."

"God bless ye for that, gude wife!" cried Iverach, catching her in his arms and kissing her withered cheek; a piece of gallantry which she owed more to Evan's native drollery and his present state of excitement, than any admiration of her person.

"I believe there is some gaucy kimmer at home, who would not like this distribution of favour, Evan," said Ronald; while Catalina clapped her hands and laughed heartily at the old dame, who, although very well pleased at the compliment, affected great indignation, and arranged her velvet hood with a mighty air.

"It's just quiet friendship for the auld body,—naething else, sir. Even puir wee Jessie Cavers wadna hae been angry, had she been present and seen me."

"Cavers—Jessie Cavers! I have heard that name before, surely?"

"It's very like ye may, sir," replied the young Highlander, a flush crossing his cheek. "She is Miss Alice Lisle's maid,—a servant lassie at the Inch-house."

"O—a girl at Inchavon? I thought the name was familiar to me," faltered Ronald, reddening in turn. "But you had better retire, and

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tell the military news to Pedro Gomez, whom I see waiting you impatiently yonder."

Reserving the newspaper for another time, Ronald, with the donna's permission, opened Macdonald's letter.

"This billet is from the army," said she, familiarly placing her arm through the young officer's and drawing close to his side, while she caused his heart to thrill at her touch. "Ah! tell me if there is any news of my brother Alvaro in it?"

"I will read it aloud, translating those parts you do not understand. It is dated from Villa Franca:—*

"DEAR STUART,

"Fassifern and the rest of ours are anxious to know how you are, after that wound you received so villanously, and from which I hope you are almost recovered by this time. Send us word by the first messenger from Merida to the front. Remember me particularly to the fair Catalina, and I assure you that your quarters at present in her splendid mansion are very different from mine here,—in a wretched hut, where the rain comes in at the roof, and the wind at a thousand crannies. You may congratulate us, my old comrade, on the easy victories we obtain over Messieurs the French, who have been driven from Almendralejo, and all the places adjacent, with little loss on our part. I now write you from a village, out of which our brigade drove them a few days ago. How much you would have admired the gallantry of our Spanish friend Don Alvaro, who accompanied us in this affair. On our approaching the enemy, they retired without firing a shot at first, and his troop of lancers, who were halted on the road leading to Los Santos, charged them at full gallop, shouting *Viva Ferdinand! Espana! Espana y buena Esperanza!*"

"Noble Alvaro! my brave brother!" interrupted Catalina, her eyes sparkling with delight. "I will always love this *officiale* for what he says. Oh! that Inesella was here! She is betrothed to Alvaro, senor, and would have been wedded long since, but for a quarrel they had about Donna Ermina, the wife of old Salvador, the guerilla chief."

"It was a noble sight," continued the letter, "to see the tall lances levelled to the rest, the steel helmets flashing in the sun, and to hear the clang of the rapid hoofs, as the Spaniards rushed down the brae and broke upon the enemy with the force of a whirlwind, a thunderbolt, or anything else you may suppose. Campbell protested it equalled the charge of the Mamelukes, when *he* 'was in Egypt with Sir Ralph.' Alvaro has now gone off to join Murillo, where he hopes to meet Don Salvador de Zagala, whom he vows to impale alive. He left me but an hour ago, and desires me in my letter to send a kiss to his sister. This, I dare swear, you will be most happy to deliver."

Ronald faltered, and turned his eye on Catalina, who blushed deeply. It was impossible to resist the temptation; her face was very close to his, and he pressed his lips upon her burning cheek.

"Read on, *senor mio*," she said, disengaging herself with exquisite grace; "perhaps there may be more about Alvaro?"

Ronald glanced his eye over the next paragraph, and passed it over in silence and confusion.

* The date of poor Macdonald's letter is now obliterated, and I have forgotten what it was,—about the month of March (1812), I think.

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"A little flirtation *en passant*, you know, will not injure your allegiance to the fair ladye whose miniature—but you may burn my letter without reading further, should I write much on that subject. Angus Mackie, a private of your company, was the other night engaged in a regular brawl with the natives of Almendralejo,—some love affair with the daughter of an old *abogado* (lawyer). I refer you for the particulars to the bearer, who was engaged in it. We had another row at Almendralejo the day we entered it. Some Spaniard, by way of insult, ran his dagger into the bag of Ranald Dhu's pipe, and so great was the wrath of the 'Son of the Mist,' that he dirked him on the spot; and although the fellow is not dead, he is declared by Doctor Stuart to be 'in a doubtful state.'

"I have sent you an Edinburgh paper (a month or two old), wherein you will see by the *Gazette* that a Louis Lisle has been appointed to us, *vice* poor Oliphant Cassilis, killed in the battle of Arroya. There are people of the name in Perthshire; perhaps you may know something of this Lisle."

The blood rushed into Ronald's face, and a mixed feeling of pleasure and shame to meet the brother of Alice filled his mind. He read on—

"I was just about to conclude this long letter, when some strange news arrived. Cindad Rodrigo has been invested, and it is supposed must capitulate soon. Our division has been ordered by Lord Wellington to retire into Portugal forthwith; the 'gathering' is at this moment ringing through the streets of Villa Franca, and the corps is getting under arms.—Adieu, &c.,

"ALISTER MACDONALD."

"P. S.—L. Lisle is at Lisbon, bringing up a detachment for ours,—a hundred rank and file. I do not know what route we take for Portugal; but you had better endeavour to join us on the way."

CHAPTER XI.

ALICE LISLE.—NEWS FROM HOME.

"As you are beauteous, were you half so true,
Here could I live, and love, and die for only you.
Now I to fighting fields am sent afar,
And strive in winter camps with toils of war;
While you, alas, that I should find it so!—"

Virgil, Pastoral x.

WITHIN the chamber which he occupied, Ronald sat late that night, musing on what was to be done, and what course was now to be steered. He saw that it was absolutely necessary that he should proceed instantly to rejoin,—a measure which the healed state of his wound rendered imperative. "The division is retreating," thought he, "and the Count D'Erlon will without doubt push forward immediately and regain possession of Merida, and I must inevitably be taken prisoner. I will join Sir Rowland as he passes through; the troops must pass here *en route* for Portugal. How dangerous to my own quiet is my acquaintance with Catalina, and how foolishly have I been tampering with her affections and with my own heart! Good heavens! I have acted very wrong in awakening in her a sentiment towards me,

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which my plighted troth to Alice and my own natural sense of honour forbid me to cherish or return. And Catalina loves me; her blushes, her downcast eyes, and her sweet confusion have betrayed it more than once. 'Tis very agreeable to feel one's self beloved, and by so fair a girl, for Catalina is very beautiful; but I must fly from her, and break those magic spells which are linking our hearts together. To-morrow —no, the day after, I will leave Merida, and join the division as soon as I hear by what route it is retiring."

Louis Lisle, too, the brother of Alice, was now an officer in the same corps, and his bold spirit would instantly lead him to seek vengeance for any false or dishonourable part acted towards his sister. "Poor Louis! he is the first friend I ever had; and how will so delicate a boy, one so tenderly nurtured, endure the many miseries of campaigning here? A single night such as that we spent in the bivouac of La Nava, would unquestionably be his death."

Here his cogitations were interrupted by the voice of Evan, who was carousing in the room below with Gomez (having spent the night together over their cups, although neither understood a word of the other's language), singing loud and boisterously,—

"Keek into the draw-well,
My Jo Janet;
And there ye'll see yer bonnie sell,
My Jo Janet:"

a performance which drew many *vivas!* from his brother-soldier. Roused from the reverie into which he had fallen, Ronald's eye fell on the newspaper sent him by Macdonald, and he now took it up, thinking to find something in it to direct the current of his thoughts; and somewhat he found with a vengeance! Better would it have been if he had never thought of it at all. It was an *Edinburgh Journal*, dated several weeks back, and appeared to have passed through the hands of the whole division, it was so worn and frittered. After scanning over the *Gazette*, to which he had turned first "with true military instinct," his eye next fell upon one of those pieces of trash styled "fashionable news." It was headed—

"Marriage in High Life.—We understand that the gallant Earl of Hyndford is about to lead to the hymeneal altar the beautiful and accomplished daughter of Sir Allan Lisle, Bart., M.P. for ———. The happy event is to take place in a few weeks at Inchavon House (Perthshire), the family seat of the venerable and much-respected baronet."

The room swam around him, and the light faded for a moment from his eye, while the hot blood gushed back tumultuously through the pulses of his heart; but clinching his teeth firmly, and mustering all his scattered energies, he read it over once more, while mingled sorrow and fury contracted and convulsed the muscles of his handsome features. There was no doubting the purport of the torturing intelligence, and Catalina was forgotten in the fierce excitement of the moment. "O Alice! Alice!" he said, bitterly and aloud, "could I ever have expected this of you? 'Tis but a few months since we parted, and she is false already. I am, indeed, soon forgotten!"

He crushed the paper up, and thrusting it into the charcoal-pan on the hearth, it was consumed in an instant. "Hyndford,—Carmichael, Earl of Hyndford! Ay; the glitter of the coronet has more charms for her eye than a subaltern's epaulet; but I would not be my father's

son, should I think more of her after this. I will learn to forget her, as she has forgotten me,—and this, too, shall perish!" He took the miniature from his neck, and was about to crush it beneath his heel; but when the well-known features met his eye, his fierce resolution melted away; he averted his head, and replaced it in his bosom, while a sad and subdued feeling took possession of his heart.

"I cannot destroy," thought he, "what has been so long a solace, and an object almost of worship to me. Even were she the bride of another, as perhaps she is at this very hour, I would yet wear and bear it for her sake, in memory of the days that are passed away, and the thoughts I had nourished for years—ay, for years—since the days we gathered the wild rose and the heather-bell on the bonnie braes I now almost wish never to behold again."

For the first hour or two, he felt as if every cord that bound him to happiness and existence was severed and broken, and an acute feeling of mental agony swelled his breast almost to bursting. His Highland pride came, however, to his aid, and roused within him feelings equally bitter, though perhaps less distressing; and starting up, he strode hastily about the apartment, and emptied more than once a large horn of Malaga, from a pig-skin which lay on a side-table near him, drinking deeply to drown care, and allay the wild tumult of his thoughts. But the wine was as water, and he quaffed it without effect.

The baseness of her desertion grew every moment more vivid; and how openly must she have renounced him, when even the public journals had become aware of her intended alliance, which must have been a measure of her own free will, as her father, Sir Allan, would never control her affections, and the age of forced marriages was passed away, or existed only in the pages of romance. Love and jealousy, sorrow, pride, and a feeling of helplessness at the great distance which separated him from Britain, passed rapidly through his mind; and during the mental agony and tumult of the first few hours, he forgot Catalina and the honourable struggles he had made with himself to withstand the witchery of her beauty, until the recollection of it rushed fully upon him, raising him in his own estimation, and lessening the fickle Alice in an equal degree.

He hastily threw open his baggage-trunk, and producing writing materials, commenced a letter, in which he meant to upbraid her bitterly, and take a haughty and sad farewell of her for ever. But so great was his agitation, so fast did his ideas crowd upon each other, and so much were they mingled together and confused, that he wrote only rhapsodies in incoherent sentences, and sheet after sheet was filled, torn up, and committed to the flames; until at last it flashed upon his mind that there were no means at present of transmitting a letter, and he abandoned the attempt altogether. Whenever he thought of Catalina, he felt more consoled for the loss of Alice; but yet the deep-rooted affection, the cherished sentiment of years, which he felt for her, was a very different feeling from the temporary admiration with which the Spanish lady had impressed him; but ideas of a prouder, and perhaps more healing kind, came to his aid.

"I tread the path which leads to the greatest of all earthly honours—even the passage to the throne lies through the tented field; and although I look not for that, the ambitious Alice may yet repent having slighted the love of Ronald Stuart of Lochisla. We know not what fate may have in store, or what the great lottery of life may cast up for me. Alice! oh, how false, how fickle, and how heartless! Like twin

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tendrils of the same tree, like little birds in the same nest, we grew unto each other—our love increasing with our size and years; and yet, after all the tender sentiments we have exchanged, and the happiness we have enjoyed, she has thus cruelly abandoned me, preferring the glitter of a title to the love of a brave and honest heart! But let her go; she will hear of me yet," he said almost aloud, while his sparkling eye fell on his claymore, which lay upon the table, "for this is the land where honour and fame are within the grasp of a reckless and daring soldier—for reckless of life and limb will I be from this hour. But I may fall unhonoured and unknown, as thousands have already done—as thousands more shall do; yet Alice, though perhaps she may drop a tear for me, will never be upbraided with the sight of my tomb!"

Long and silently he continued brooding over the cursed intelligence, which every moment grew, in his fancy, more like some vision of a disturbed slumber, or some horrible enigma; and the hour of twelve tolled from the belfry of San Juan, yet he thought not of rest. He had grown careless of all external objects, and sat with his brow leaning on his hand, absorbed in his own heart-corroding fancies. His lamp sunk down in the socket and expired; the stars and the pale moon, sailing apparently through clouds of gauze, glimmered through the tall casement into the gloomy chamber, and poor Ronald still sat there, revolving and re-revolving the matter in his mind, which became a prey, by turns, to the very opposite sentiments of love and sorrow, pride, revenge, indignation, and ambition.

* * * * * *

He awoke suddenly, and found that he had been asleep in his chair. The bright light of the morning sun was streaming between the dark hangings of the lofty windows, and the tolling bells of the neighbouring churches reminded him that it was Sunday. The instant he awoke, the aching memories of the past night rushed upon his mind; but he thought of the matter with a little more composure, and the presence of Donna Catalina, all blushes, smiles, and beauty, when the morning was further advanced, contributed very considerably to the re-establishment of his serenity, but her keen eye observed that he was ill at ease. His usual vivacity was gone; he appeared much abstracted, seldom speaking except of his departure, and in a tone of more than usual regret. They had previously arranged to visit the church of San Juan on that day, that Ronald might see high mass performed, and hear the sub-prior, whom the citizens considered a miracle of learning and piety, preach.

Catalina retired to don her walking attire, while Ronald, from the balcony, gazed listlessly into the street, scarcely observing what was passing there. Peasantry from the neighbourhood were crowding in, attired in dresses at once graceful and picturesque; the men wearing, some the close vest, the broad sombrero, knee-breeches, and large mantle, while others were without it, in a loose jacket, with a sash of ample size and gaudy colours tied round their waists, and having on their heads long slouched caps. Many—almost all—wore knives displayed somewhere about their person, and all had a peculiar swagger in their walk, which seemed not ungraceful. Bright-eyed women in their black hoods or mantillas,—priests in their dark robes of sack-cloth, their waists encircled with a knotted cord,—graceful peasant girls, their short bunchy petticoats displaying the most splendid ancles in the

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world,—sturdy muleteers with their long whips,—and market-women from the south bearing loads of butter, milk, and fruit, on their heads, were crowding the streets and thronging about the dark piazzas in every direction, and a loud gabble of tongues in Spanish was heard on all sides. Clouds of smoke arose from cigars, as every man had one in his mouth; and here and there, under some of the piazzas, might be seen a few muleteers and olive-cheeked girls, dancing a fandango or bolero about the door of a wine-house to the sound of the guitar, the tambarine, and the castanets.

"How very different is all this from the sober gravity which marks our Scottish Sabbath-day!" thought Ronald, as he glanced languidly around the Plaza. Notwithstanding the mental excitement under which he laboured, the chain of ideas recalled to his memory a few lines of a poem he had once read, and which he now repeated to himself:—

> "O Scotland! much I love thy tranquil dales;
> But most on Sabbath eve, when low the sun
> Slants through the upland copse, 'tis my delight,
> Wandering and stopping oft to hear the song
> Of kindred praise arise from humble roofs;
> Or when the simple service ends, to hear
> The lifted latch, and mark the grey-haired man,
> The father and the priest, walk forth alone
> Into his garden plat or little field,
> To commune with his God in secret prayer."*

This was one of the many passages in it which were impressed upon his memory, and he remembered, with peculiar bitterness of feeling, that it was with Alice Lisle he had first perused the pages of that now forgotten poem, seated by her side in one of the green birchen glades through which the Isla flowed towards the Tay.

The heavy clang of a charger's hoofs broke in upon his reverie, and raising his eyes, he saw an officer of the light cavalry ride furiously into the Plaza, with his uniform covered with dust, and his horse and accoutrements dripping with white foam. Casting a rapid glance around him, he spurred at once beneath the balcony over which Ronald leaned, knowing him to be a British officer from his uniform.

He checked his horse by the curb-stone of the pavement.

"Evelyn—Lieutenant Evelyn, 13th Light Dragoons," said he, introducing himself. "Mr. Stuart, I presume?"

"Yes,—Stuart, of the 92nd Regiment," replied Ronald bowing. "I believe I have had the pleasure of seeing you before?"

"Ay, near La Nava, the evening we drove in Dombrouski's advanced picquet."

"I now remember. But what word from the front?"

"Oh! the old story,—a countermarch. Campaigning is like a game at chess: we have been ordered to retire into Portugal, and the second division will be in full retreat, by this time. I suppose they will come down the other bank of the Guadiana."

"This movement, likely, has some relation to the recent investment of Ciudad Rodrigo. You will, of course, have heard of that?"

"Our works are carried within a very short distance of theirs. It is said that Marshal Marmont imagines it will hold out for several weeks yet; before which time he will give Lord Wellington battle, and

* "The Sabbath: a Poem." Second Edition. Blackwood, Edinburgh, 1805.

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attempt its relief. His lordship appears to be preparing, as troops from all quarters are concentrating under his command; so that, should Ciudad Rodrigo not soon capitulate, we may expect a battle with Marmont in a few days."

"Of course it must fall; Marmont will never attempt its relief. But will you not dismount and refresh yourself? You appear to have ridden far."

"I regret that it is impossible to dismount; I have tarried too long already. I am carrying despatches from Sir Rowland Hill to the rear, and I must be far beyond Albuquerque before night. My orders were to ride without drawing bridle; but my nag is failing already. Just before I left Fuente del Maistre, an orderly dragoon brought up the mail-bags from Lisbon; and a Major Campbell of yours, an immensely big man, but a soldier-like fellow, who insisted that he had seen me in Egypt, although I never was there, gave me a letter for you, that I might deliver it, on my route, at Merida."

"I thank you," replied Ronald in a scarcely articulate voice, while his fluttering heart became a prey to alternate hopes and fears.

"I trust it will contain good news for you," said the horseman, unbuckling his sabre-tache. "Our letters here are like angels' visits, 'few and far between,' the post delivery being less regular than within sight of St. Paul's. By the bye, how is that wound you received the morning we marched from this? I heard something of the story, and would be glad to hear it all, had I time; but there are so many hard knocks going now, that one cares little about them. Your arm is still in the sling, I see."

"I mean to discard it to-day. I am quite recovered now, and am about to rejoin immediately. But the letter?"

"Ay, here it is," replied Evelyn, raising himself in his stirrups, and handing the letter to Ronald, who received it by stooping over the balcony, and knew at once the large round family seal, and the handwriting of his father.

"Alice, Alice! Evelyn, is there not another?" he groaned aloud, in the bitterness of his spirit.

"Another?" laughed the cavalry officer, who heard him but imperfectly. "No, by Jupiter; and I am sorry the one you have received does not seem to be in the small running-hand of a fair lady; but it may contain what makes ample amends, you know,—a remittance from the old gentleman, through Gordon, your paymaster, who is as jolly a fellow as ever broached a pipe or a pig-skin of wine. Ah! 'tis well when the old boy bleeds liberally. But now, so ho! for the road again! I would advise you to look out sharply while here. D'Erlon, the moment he becomes aware of our temporary retreat, will throw forward some of his cavalry, and regain the places he has lost. The low grounds by the river-side afford great advantages for a concealed movement, and you run a risk of being taken prisoner: the idea struck me as I entered the town a few minutes ago."

"How far is the division from this?" asked Ronald, impatiently awaiting the other's departure, that he might peruse the letter; a day's march, think you?"

"Three, perhaps; Fuente del Maistre is a long way off. Remember that you must be careful what kind of guide you employ, should you require one in rejoining. And now, adieu!"

"Adieu!" echoed Ronald. The other gave his horse the spur

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let his reins drop, and was round the corner of the Plaza, out of sight in an instant.

Feeling all that trembling eagerness and indescribable delight which the arrival of a first letter from home, after a long absence, infuses into the heart, Ronald tore it open, but for some minutes was baffled in his attempts to read by an envious mist or film, which seemed to intercept his sight and prevented him from proceeding further than the date, which was upwards of a month back. The letter ran thus, and the ideas and style of the good old gentleman were observable in every line of it:—

"Lochisla, February 28th, 1812.

"My dear Boy,

"I received your letters dated from Lisbon and Portalagre in due course, and cannot find words to express how overjoyed I was to understand by them that you were well, and did not feel the fatigue of long marches. Ronald, my son, may God protect you! You are very dear to me indeed,—dearer even than the little ones that sleep in the old kirkyard. I can scarce get on further, for the salt and hot tears are filling my eyes, and it is no common emotion which makes a stern old man, like me, weep. We are living much in the old way here at the tower, with the exception that your absence has made a sad blank in the little establishment. My dear boy, I am very lonely now, and it is grievous when a man feels himself so in his old age. Your gentle mother, and her four little boys, are with the angels in heaven; the green grass covers their sunny ringlets, and you alone were spared me, but only to be exposed to the dangers of a soldier's life,—dangers which make my heart shrink within me for your safety.

* * * * *

"How very quiet is all around me at the moment I am writing! The bright evening sun is streaming through the mullions of the old hall window on the hearth, where you used to play when a little child, and your two old companions, Carril and Odin, are stretched upon the rug; they often whine, and look sadly in my face, or at your bonnet and gun in the corner, as if they still missed you. The noble hounds! I believe that although six months have elapsed since you were here, they have not forgotten you. The wind scarcely stirs the thickets about the tower, and all is very calm and still, all save the beating of my own anxious heart, and its pulsations are audible.

"All our friends and dependants here desire to be remembered to you and to Evan Iverach; and I am assured danger will never visit you, if the prayers of brave and honest hearts can avert it; for the people at the clachan, and in all the glen, pray for you nightly and daily, particularly old Donald. He does not pipe about so much as he used to do, but pays more attention than ever he did to the whiskey kegs in Janet's pantry. Poor man! I forgive his melancholy; like me, he mourns the absence of an only son.

"Corrie-oich and I have quarrelled again, about a fight which took place at the last fair, between his herdsman and Alpin Oig. I would fain harry the lair of the old fox, and give his turreted house to the flames, as my father did in 1746. I would teach his fellows to beware how they spoke to a servant or follower of mine.

"I am likely to have a row with Inchavon also. He has trespassed more than once on our marches in his shooting excursions, in which he is always accompanied now by the Earl of Hyndford, who, it is said, is to be married to Miss Lisle, an old flame of yours, whom I trust you have forgotten by this time, as she has undoubtedly done you.

"Inchavon's son has received a pair of colours in your regiment, and has left Perthshire to join; you will, of course, keep him at a due distance, and, as you value my paternal love, make neither a friend nor companion of him. Forget not the words your gallant old grandfather used, after cutting down Colonel Lisle at Falkirk:—'Never trust a Lisle of Inchavon, until your blade is through his body.'

"Sir Allan has revived his old claim to the lands and vacant peerage of Lyale, and Hyndford, who is one of our representative peers, is using all his interest for him in the upper house. Let him fish for any rank he pleases; our blood, my boy, is nobler than his own. We have been Stuarts of Lochiala since the days of our royal ancestor' Robert the Second, and I seek no other title.

"By the bye, that scoundrel Æneas Macquirk, the W.S. in Edinburgh, some time ago procured my name, as cautioner for a very large sum, to a deed connected with some cursed insurance business, of which I knew nothing. I fear the fellow is tottering in his circumstances; and should he fail, I will be utterly ruined, and the old tower, which has often defied an armed host, will, perhaps, be surrendered to some despicable Lowland creditor. To a Highlander, who knows nothing of legal chicanery, what a curse those harpies of the law are! Remember me to John Cameron of Fassifern, your colonel; he is a brave and good officer, and a true Highland gentleman. Be attentive to your duties, and never shrink from——— But I need not say that; I know that you will do what man dare do, and will never disgrace the house you spring from, or the gallant regiment to which you belong. Good bye to you, my boy! let me hear from you soon and often; and that He, whose presence is everywhere, may ever bless and protect you, will be always the earnest prayer of your desolate old father,

"LAN STUART."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONDE.

"The anthem rang; for on the heavenward air
'*Gloria in excelsis*' swept along,
From voices soft and forms divinely fair,
While the lone echoes did the notes prolong,
Swelling the numbers of the sweet angelic song."
Scenes among the Mountains, canto i.

So much was Ronald engrossed in the perusal of this letter, which so fully displays the eccentric manners of his father, that it was not until he had withdrawn his eyes from its pages that he became aware of the presence of Catalina, who stood by his side, veiled and robed in her velvet mantilla for church.

"You have received a letter from your home? I trust—I hope—there is nothing in it to cause you sorrow. Why do you sigh so very sadly?" said she, in a tone of thrilling tenderness.

"Indeed I cannot say that its contents are calculated to instil any other sentiments than sorrow," replied Ronald, depositing it in his bonnet; "and I fear, Catalina, that the last day I shall pass with—with you, will be a very unhappy one."

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"The last day!" she repeated sorrowfully. "And are you still resolved on going so soon?"

"My arm, you perceive, is perfectly well now," replied the officer, tossing away the sling in which it hung; "and it is indispensable, if I would save my honour from disagreeable surmises, that I rejoin my regiment. Dearest Catalina! a hundred other circumstances, of which you are ignorant, compel me to leave you,—to leave you perchance for ever." While he spoke, a passionate flush gathered on his cheek, and passing his arm around the waist of the yielding girl, he drew her gently towards him; yet even the feeling of delight which he experienced at that moment, mingled with a sensation of anger at the faithlessness of Alice Lisle. To revenge himself, he pressed his lips a second time to the soft and burning cheek of the beautiful Spaniard, and felt his blood fly like lightning through his veins, while he watched the long lashes which modestly shaded the brilliance of her eyes, and read the smile of pleasure and inexpressible sweetness that played around her finely-formed mouth.

A step was heard on the staircase.

"*Santa Maria! Senor mio, el senor Gobernador;* my uncle the prior!" she whispered, starting from Ronald's encircling arm. "Oh, 'tis only my gossiping cousin," she added with a smile, as Inesella de Truxillo swept into the apartment, with a long lace veil reaching from her stately head nearly to her feet, enveloping her tall and dashing figure.

"Pho! I fear I have interrupted some very gallant and tender scene. How very unlucky! Catalina, *mi queredo*, how you blush! Your veil and long glossy ringlets are all sadly disordered. Indeed, senor, you have quite turned the poor girl's head, and I fear we shall have some unhappy brawl, should my brother the Condé de Truxillo hear of it. He is one of Catalina's most passionate admirers, and we expect him here shortly."

"Inesella, I thought you were my uncle the prior," faltered Catalina, blushing with confusion.

"Our uncle, the padre?" cried the gay girl with a loud laugh. "*O madre de Dios!* do my little feet, which our citizens of Merida admire so much, make so great a noise as your old gobernador's? Besides, he never leaves his room. *Mi queredo*, you compliment me! But you must remember that I am considered the best waltzer in Madrid, and the cavaliers there pretend to be very excellent judges. My poor cousin, you are very much abashed; allow me to arrange your curls. But you should not be flirting here with a young *officiale* instead of being at mass, and *el Gobernador* should give you a sermon for doing so. But the bells have ceased to toll, and we shall be late; 'tis fully five minutes' walk from here to the porch of San Juan's church. So let us be gone at once, and use our joint endeavours to make you, senor, a convert to the true faith."

Ronald replied only by an unmeaning smile; and taking his sword and bonnet, prepared to accompany the young ladies. They were followed by Evan Iverach and Pedro Gomez, carrying camp-stools for their accommodation, the church (as usual in Spain) not being fitted up with pews; so that all who do not provide themselves with seats, are obliged to remain either on their feet or on their knees.

An indescribable emotion of deep religious veneration, inspiration almost of holy awe, filled the agitated mind of the young Highlander

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with sensations which he had never before experienced, when, for the first time in his life, he found himself beneath the groined roof and gigantic arches of the Roman Catholic cathedral, while all its thousand hollow echoes were replying to the notes of the sublime organ, the bold trumpet-tones of which shook the very pavement and grave-stones beneath his feet. The appearance of the church, being so very different from what he had ever beheld before, made also a deep impression on his mind: the tall traceried windows, filled with gorgeously-stained glass,—the strong variations of light and shadow which they caused,—the long lines of shafted columns, and the domed roof which sprung from their foliaged capitals,—the perfumes of the lavender-flowers which, arising from smoking censers, filled the air,—the dark and gloomy altar-piece, with the altar itself bearing a gigantic crucifix of gilt-work and enormous candlesticks of silver, the pale lights twinkling around it,—the floating drapery of the officiating priests,—the sonorous prayers uttered in an unknown language, and the fervent responses of the swarthy congregation, together with "the pealing organ" and the melodious song of the young choristers,—all these combined, entranced and elevated the enthusiastic soul of the young Highlander, raising it from the grossness and bitterness of earth almost, as it were, to heaven, so grand and impressive, in form and ceremony, is the religious service of the Church of Rome, as it exists on the continent in all its ancient glory.

Poor Evan, who had never heard any other religious music than the humble Presbyterian psalm in Lochisla kirk, was for some time struck with a feeling of such awe, that he scarcely dared to lift his eyes, lest he should encounter the formidable gaze of some spirit or divinity standing on the altar; and the wonderful sound of the music caused his bold heart to shrink, although he could have heard, without his courage failing, the roar of a thousand pieces of cannon. However, when the music ceased, and he had recovered his usual self-possession, the native prejudices and inherent sourness of the true Presbyterian assumed its ascendancy in his mind.

"O sir, is this no an unco kirk?" he whispered from behind. "Gude guide us! never will I trust myself within the yett o' ane mair. Just look, sir, at that puir papist Pedro, how he yammers, and counts his string o' yellow beads ower and ower again. O'd, sir, this dings a'! And look at the pictures, the images, and a' that: it's just a temptin' o' Providence to trust oursels inside o' this nest o' papistry, idolatry, and deevildom. Hech me, sir, what would the auld men and caillochs in the clachan o' Lochisla think or say if they kenned we were here? And what would our decent body o' a minister, auld maister Mucklewhame, think o' that chield's awfu' blatter o' lang nebbit words?"

Ronald had often motioned him to be silent, and he now ceased as the sub-prior, a black-browed priest of the order of St. Francis of Assisi, ascended barefooted the marble steps which led to the lofty pulpit. He was attired in the garb of his order, a grey gown and a cowl of woollen stuff, girt about his middle with a knotted cord of discipline. His chaplet hung at his girdle, and his cowl, falling over his neck, displayed his swarthy features, coal-black hair, and shaven scalp. At the same time, Ronald encountered the smiling glances which the keen bright eyes of the ladies bestowed on him, as they watched from time to time the impression made upon him by the

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solemnity of their church service. The sermon of the Franciscan was filled more with politics and invectives against the French and their emperor, than religious matters, dwelling emphatically on the singular addition made by the priests to the Spanish Catechism at that time, "to love all mankind, excepting Frenchmen, of whom it was their duty to kill as many as possible."*

"Well, Evan, what think you of the discourse?" said Ronald, in the low voice in which the groups clustered round the columns generally conversed. "I dare say the Spanish sounds very singular to your ear."

"Ay, sir, it puts me in mind o' an auld saying o' my faither the piper. 'A soo may whussle, but its mouth is no made for't.' O'd, sir, I wadna gie the bonnie wee kirk at Lochisla, wi' its grassy graveyard, whar we used to play on the Sabbath mornings, for a' the kirks in Spain, forbye—"

"Hush!" At that moment the priest had raised his voice, while denouncing a curse upon all heretics; and his keen expressive eye fell, perhaps unconsciously, on Ronald, whose cheek reddened with momentary anger.

Evan's reply, and his native Scottish accent, caused Ronald to indulge in the same train of ideas. He acknowledged in his own heart, that notwithstanding the gorgeous display before him, he would prefer the humble and earnest, the simple and unassuming service in the old village kirk at home,—the quiet sermon of the white-haired minister, and the slowly sung psalm, raised with all the true fervour, the holy and sober feeling which animate a Scottish congregation, and recall the soul-stirring emotions which inspired those who bled at Bothwell, at Pentland, and Drumelog. He thought of Alice, too; and eagerly did he long for the arrival of her brother Louis, that the cause of her heartless desertion might be explained.

The cry of "*Viva la Religion y Espana! Muera Buonaparte!*" from the preacher, echoed by the deep tone of a thousand Spanish tongues, awoke him from his reverie, and he took prisoner within his own the white hand of Catalina, who was playing with the silk tassels of his sash, unconscious of what she was doing.

"Senor," said she, blushing, and withdrawing it, "you seem very melancholy."

"I have, indeed, much reason to be so. How can I appear otherwise, when the hours we shall spend together are so few?" But she may forget me as soon as Alice has done, thought he, and his heart swelled at the idea. The donna made no immediate reply, and Ronald was surprised to perceive her colour change from white to the deepest crimson, and then become deadly pale again, while her dark eyes flashed with peculiar brilliancy and light.

"Senor, the original of this is probably the cause of your sadness," she said, in a tremulous voice, while she held up her rival's miniature, which had fallen from the lapelle of Ronald's uniform, and hung at the full extent of the chain. "She is very beautiful. If this is her miniature, she must be a queen among women; and you love her very much, doubtless," she added in a cold and sorrowful tone, which sunk deeply into the heart of Ronald, as he hastily concealed the object of her emotion.

* See "Memoirs of the War in Spain, from 1808 to 1814; by Marshal Suchet, Duke d'Albufera."

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"May I ask who she is, senor?"

"A very dear friend, or rather one who was such."

"She is dead, then; or perhaps it is a portrait of a sister?"

"I never had one," replied the young man, colouring with confusion, while he taxed his imagination to find a reply in vain. Happily for him, he was relieved from his dilemma by an exclamation from Donna Inesella, who had hitherto sat silent, and had, or affected to have, been gazing intently at the preacher.

"Holy Virgin!" she earnestly whispered. "See, Catalina, yonder is my brother the condé, leaning against the third column from Pizarro's monument."

"Here at church—the Condé de Truxillo here?" replied her cousin, becoming pale and agitated.

"Would to Heaven and San Juan that Balthazzar was anywhere else than here at this moment! Somewhat disagreeable will certainly come of it. Oh, senor! I tremble for you."

"For me, Donna Inesella! Sure you mean not what you say. I have a hand to protect myself with, and care not a straw for any condé or cavalier in Spain."

"True, senor. I meant not to offend, but my brother Balthazzar is so fiery. Ah! he sees us now."

Ronald looked in the direction pointed out, and saw a handsome Spanish officer in a dashing staff-uniform, wearing massive epaulets and aiguiets of silver, and a score of military orders of knighthood, stars, badges, ribands, medals, and crosses on his breast, leaning listlessly against a pillar of the church, holding in one hand his cocked hat, which was adorned with a large plume of red and yellow feathers, while the other rested on the hilt of a very long and straight Toledo. With a careless sort of glance, he cast his eye along the aisle, as if he had been watching them ever since their first entrance; but on perceiving himself observed, he came hastily towards them. A frown for a moment crossed his fine forehead; but the next a soft smile replaced it, and he stroked the coal-black moustache which curled on his upper lip, forming a contrast in hue with his remarkably white teeth below.

To his sister and cousin he paid his compliments in a graceful and polite, yet distant manner.

"Balthazzar, this is the British officer of whom I told you in my last letter," whispered Inesella, introducing Ronald; "the same who saved Alvaro de Villa Franca's life when ——"

"I have heard all the story; so spare me a repetition of it," replied he, waving his hand and coldly bowing to Ronald, at whose presence he felt a displeasure which, certes, he took very little pains to conceal.

"But tell me, Balthazzar, what has brought you here so unexpectedly? and why do you frown in so unbecoming a manner?"

"Faith, Inesella! you are exceedingly unpolite; but to be angry with you is useless. I am carrying despatches from my colonel, the Condé Penne Villamur, to Don Carlos d' Espana, and I must leave Merida in a few hours, or less. But how is it that my fair cousin Catalina has not one smile of welcome to bestow on me, though six months have elapsed since I was last at Merida?"

"Indeed, Balthazzar, I am most happy to see you; but *el senor padre* would little like my laughing in church, you know."

"*El senor padre?* pho! But where is that most prudent of brothers Don Alvaro now? I heard that he had run his captain through the body, and so got command of his troop."

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"'Twas a base falsehood circulated by old Don Salvador, whose guerillas were supposed to have done the deed; but Alvaro has joined the Spanish army under Murillo, cousin condé."

"He is a thoughtless brother, truly," replied the condé, glancing at Ronald, "to go off thus, leaving you under the care of my uncle the prior, who is nearly as useless now as a piece of spiked ordnance. A young lady without guidance——But you look as if about to speak, senor."

"Don Salvador de Zagala," observed Ronald, whom the condé had never addressed until now, "is also with Murillo; and there may be some dangerous brawl between Alvaro and him, should they meet."

"*O Dios mio!* Santa Maria forbid," exclaimed the young ladies together.

"It would be more prudent in Alvaro, senor, to allow the guerilla chief to go in peace, and without molestation. He suffered the wrong, and was in the right to resent it. My cousin Alvaro, although an accomplished soldier, is no match for old Salvador, who in the use of the sword and pistol has scarcely his equal in Spain; besides, Murillo is a fine old fellow, and he takes most summary vengeance upon any noble cavalier who seeks the free privilege of the duello in the camp. I presume, senor, you are at Merida on some duty? I believe you will find it very agreeable,—much more so than hard fighting and long marches."

"No, condé; I have been here for the recovery of a wound, received from a Spanish hand in a manner at once base and dishonourable," replied Ronald, his brows contracting at the sarcastic tone used by the Spanish officer: "a wound in the arm which is barely healed, and it is scarcely an hour since I relinquished the scarf in which it hung."

"Then, senor, I think that the sooner you rejoin your brave regiment, the better for your fair fame. A gallant soldado who values his honour would scarcely permit a scratch to detain him from the field."

"A scratch! How now, condé! what am I to understand by this premeditated rudeness?" said Ronald furiously and aloud, his cheek flushing, and his eye sparkling with anger. "What mean you, senor?"

"Merely what I have said, senor officiale," replied Don Balthazzar in the same provoking tone of sarcastic coldness. "But be pleased to moderate your transports for another and more fitting time. It would ill become a noble cavalier, like me, to brawl at church or in the presence of ladies. But you shall hear from me again, senor;" and bestowing a vindictive glance at Ronald, and a cold bow on his cousin and sister, he pressed through the crowd, and left the church.

"Holy Virgin! Inesella, O Dios! I dreaded that this would come to pass the moment I saw Balthazzar here," whispered Catalina in great agitation. "He is so fierce and untractable, that he never visits Merida without fighting a duel with some one. But you, *senor mio*, surely you will not lay to heart what he has said to you?"

"Calm yourself, Catalina. I know not what to think; but certainly his behaviour to me is very unaccountable. Have no apprehension on my account; as I said before, I care not for any cavalier in Spain, and Heaven knows there are plenty of them."

"Pho! Catalina," said her thoughtless cousin; "heed not Balthazzar's angry looks, though, indeed, he can be fierce enough when he pleases. He will probably depart immediately with his despatches: he said he had but a short time to tarry."

"Pray Heaven that may be so!"

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"And then Don Ronald and he will perhaps never meet again."

"Let us leave the church. O Inesella! how my heart flutters."

"Indeed, my sweet cousin, your eyes have been the cause of more than one duel already, as the notches on Balthazzar's sword can testify; and you have great reason to feel sorrow and disquiet."

"I hear the hoofs of a horse; 'tis galloping through the Plaza."

"It must be his, Catalina; thanks to our Lady of the rock, he is gone! They may meet no more."

The ladies were, however, both mistaken. Scarcely had Ronald escorted them home, before Evan placed in his hand a note, addressed to "El Noble Caballero, Don Ronaldo Stuart, 92nd Regimiento, Calle de Guadiana."

In spite of the many vexations which annoyed him, Ronald well nigh laughed on seeing this strange and imperfect address. "This is some trick of Alister's," thought he, as he tore open the billet, the contents of which undeceived him.

"SENOR,

"When the clock of the Casa del Ayuntamiento strikes the hour of two, I shall be awaiting you in the thicket behind the ruins of the castle of Merida. You will not fail to come well armed.

"BALTHAZZAR DE TRUXILLO."

Anger and surprise were Ronald's first emotions on perusing this unlooked-for challenge, which he considered an additional aggression; and having already been grossly insulted, he deeply regretted that he had not "stolen a march" on the condé, by sending him the hostile message first.

"The devil!" muttered he; "this will be a pretty winding-up of matters, to be shot by this vindictive Spaniard! But, everything considered, my life is scarcely worth having: certes, a challenge could not have come at a better time, when my heart is filled with misanthropy, gall, and bitterness, and my feelings deadened by the news I have received within these twenty-four hours. Perhaps Alice may weep when she reads of my death in the *Gazette*,—so and so to be ensign, *vice* Stuart, deceased. Sorrow or death—come what may, my heart is strung for it all." A sour smile crossed his features, and he glanced at the clock of the corporation-house; it wanted but a quarter of two.

"I shall be late," said he, buckling on his sword. "What shall I do in this cursed dilemma? I have neither a friend to accompany me, nor pistols to use; and the condé may object to so formidable a weapon as the broad-sword. Would to God Macdonald, Chisholm, or any of ours, were here! Evan," said he, turning to his servant, who had watched his excitement, and heard his half-muttered speeches with considerable concern and surprise. "Evan!"

"O'd, sir, ye needna speak sae loud: I'm just behint ye. What's yer wull, sir?"

"I have received a challenge to fight that Spanish officer you saw at church, and you must accompany me as second. It will be prudent to come armed, as some of these Spaniards are treacherous hounds, and the condé may be no better than his neighbours. Get your musket and accoutrements, and follow me to the ruinous castle at the end of the town; but do not alarm the young ladies, who I see are walking in the garden below."

"A duel! to fecht a duel? Gude guide us, sir, that's unco sud-

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den," replied Evan, turning pale with concern. "And are ye really gaun?"

"Going, Iverach! can you ask me such a question?"

"And your sair arm scarcely weel yet!—it will never do. O'd, sir, let me gang in your place, and my name's no Evan Iverach if I dinna gie that saucy-looking chield his kail through the reek."

"Obey me instantly,—the time is nearly up; follow me at once, without further trifling. I should regret to speak harshly, Iverach, as this, perhaps, is the last day we may ever spend together. I have a great regard for you, Evan; we have been friends since we were little children, and I always forget the distance which birth and the rules of the service place between us in consequence."

"O sir! O'd, sir—"

"Should I fall," said Ronald, speaking in a rapid though faltering tone, "should I fall, you will find some papers and other matters in my baggage, which I wish transmitted home to Lochisla; and these I desire you will deliver either to Major Campbell or Mr. Macdonald."

"Sir, sir—O Maister Ronald! my very heart is bursting to hear ye rin on in that gait," replied Evan, beginning to shed tears, which he strove in vain to conceal. "I would—I would wi' pleasure gang in your place, face this chield mysel, and gie him what he deserves. Dinna think the waur o' me, sir, because I greet like a bairn. I would face hand to hand ony mortal man without quailing; but my spirit flees clean awa' when danger draws nigh you."

"Stay, Evan, my dear old playfellow; hold, for Heaven's sake. You will quite unman me. I am indeed deeply sensible of the regard you bear me, and have not forgotten the kind act you performed in our wretched bivouac at La Nava. But dry your tears; your fathers did not weep when they followed mine to battle."

"Ye are richt, sir," replied Evan, recovering his self-possession as his pride was roused; "but my faither wadna be ashamed to yammer himsel, if he kenned that danger was nigh you. May be at this hour they ken it at Lochisla: auld Janet sees things farther off than ither folk. Ye'll no forget she has the gift o' the second-sicht."

"Listen! If anything should happen to me, you will find attached to this chain a miniature of Miss Lisle,—Miss Lisle of Inchavon," continued his master in a tremulous voice. "Tell Mr. Macdonald it is my particular desire that it be restored to her, or her brother Louis, who will shortly be with the regiment. I trust in Heaven you will see this done. And for my father—my poor father! you will find in my largest trunk——But I will tell you the rest by the way: it is useless addressing you while you are in this agitated state. Keep up your heart, Evan, like a man and a Highlander!"

"Sir, if ye should fa'," replied Evan, in a tone of assumed firmness, "a' that ye tell me most religiously will I obey,—ay, obey as I would the commands o' a voice frae Heaven itself,—that is, if I can survive you, which I dinna think possible. O hoo could I ever face the puir auld laird at hame, and tell o' what had come ower ye in this unco place?" The honest fellow pressed his master's hands between his own, while he endeavoured to subdue his sorrow and dread.

"But for what do I greet, sir?" said he, placing his regimental bonnet jauntily on one side of his head. "A Scotchman is as gude as a Spaniard, and better, may be. Ye were aye a deadly shot on the muirs, and may settle this chield, as ye have dune mony a bonnie fallow-deer, by an ounce o' lead in the wame."

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At that moment the bell of the Casa del Ayuntamiento tolled the hour of two.

"Time is up, by heavens!" exclaimed Ronald passionately; "and this cursed count has obtained a triumph over me: he will be first on the ground!" He cast a hasty glance at the graceful figure of Catalina, as she leant on the margin of the fountain conversing with Donna Inesella. Evan hastily examined the lock of his musket, and they sallied forth in silence.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DUEL.

"It has a strange, quick jar upon the ear,
That cocking of a pistol, when you know
A moment more will bring the sight to bear
Upon your person,—twelve yards off, or so;
A gentlemanly distance, not too near,
If you have got a former friend for foe.
But after being fired at once or twice,
The ear becomes more Irish, and less nice."

Don Juan, canto iv.

PASSING rapidly through the Plaza, and down the great street which leads towards the Guadiana, they ascended the eminence on the outside of the city, where the remains of the mouldering fortress stand. It was a solitary spot, surrounded by thickets of bushes and tall weeping willows. There was little chance of an interruption in such a place, especially at an hour when the streets were almost deserted, while the lazy Spaniards were enjoying their siesta. Within one of the square courts, round which rose the mossy fragments of shattered towers, they found the Condé de Truxillo holding his charger by the bridle, and conversing with the Spanish doctor, Mendizabal, whose case of instruments was displayed on a large mass of fallen masonry near.

The condé seemed to be impatiently awaiting Ronald's appearance.

"Senor!" said he haughtily, "you have been in no hurry to attend my summons. I believe I mentioned in the church of San Juan that I was hastening with despatches to Don Carlos d'Espana, and consequently had no time to lose in Merida."

"I am but a few minutes beyond the appointed time, condé; and you must be aware that the notice I received was very sudden."

"As sudden as unwelcome, perhaps."

"Senor! your observations are contemptible and your blood alone can wipe out your repeated insolence," was Ronald's fierce reply. "Condé, your life only can atone for such conduct; and by the heavens above, we part not this day until the sword is dyed with the blood of one or both of us."

"This is mighty gay! Your language promises bold deeds, senor," replied the other ironically.

"For what have I received this hostile message from you, condé? from you, whom I have never wronged?"

"When I acquaint you, senor," replied the Spaniard, his olive cheek glowing for an instant; "when I acquaint you that Catalina de

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Villa Franca is my betrothed wife, I have, perhaps, sufficiently answered that question."

"Donna Catalina is no more to me than any other lady in Spain," said Ronald, colouring in turn, for he knew the assertion to be false.

"Enough!" replied the condé fiercely, "I did not come here to chatter, senor,—my time is too short for that. You have brought pistols, of course?"

"I have no weapon but my sword; and I am perfect master of it."

"We will prove that in good time. I, however, am better provided." He took from his holsters a very handsome pair of long horse-pistols. "Choose one, senor; and here are ball-cartridges enough to last us till sunset, which you are scarcely like to see, if my hand is as steady as it usually is."

Ronald replied only by a scornful smile, and they proceeded each to load.

"Now, then," said Truxillo, "we are all ready, I suppose. I will retire to the ruinous wall, and you will please to stand where you are. 'Tis a very convenient distance. But what mean you by bringing an armed soldier with you here?" he exclaimed, his attention being attracted to Evan by the latter, in the excitement of the moment, loosening his bayonet in the sheath.

"He is a private soldier of my own regiment. I had no other friend in Merida to accompany me."

"Friend? A brave soldier requires none to assist him in defence of his honour. You must know, senor, that a Spanish cavalier, in an affair of this sort, seeks no other ally than a sharp blade and sure eye: however, desire your fellow to retire, that there may be no treachery. We draw lots for the first shot, I presume?"

"Agreed, condé," answered Ronald, whose Highland blood was all on fire, and whose anger had been gradually increasing at the cavalier's insolent demeanour and assumed tone of superiority, until he longed, with a fierce eagerness, to chastise him, by the infliction of some severe bodily injury,—if not totally to deprive him of life. Lots were drawn by Doctor Mendizabal, and the *first* shot fell to the condé. An expression of triumphant malice glittered in his large dark eyes; he smiled sourly, showing his white teeth, and retreated close to the ruinous wall, where he planted himself about sixteen paces off, and examined with the most scrupulous accuracy the flint, priming, and muzzle of his pistol.

With the other in his right hand, Ronald stood erect, awaiting the condé's fire.

I must own, that when he heard the *click* of the lock, his heart for a moment failed him at the prospect of so sudden a death, and the fear of falling unrevenged: it was the feeling of a moment only,—the next he was all stern eagerness to be fired at, and to fire in his turn, should he survive. With clasped hands and starting eyes Evan watched the heart-stirring affair, stoutly resolving, should his master fall, to avenge him by driving his bayonet through the heart of Don Balthazzar.

"*Cuidado, senor officiale,*" cried the condé, triumphantly; "Don Alvaro's imprudence is likely to cost you dear. By Our Lady of the Rock, your life is forfeited. I am the most deadly shot in all Castile; but yet I would spare you on one condition,—that you swear by a

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soldier's sacred word of honour, never again to come into the presence of Donna Catalina."

"What right have you to dictate terms so degrading? Never, proud Spaniard, while I live will I make such a promise."

"Then die!" cried the other furiously. He raised his pistol: his eye glanced over the sight for a second,—he fired, and the surrounding ruins rang with the sharp report. Ronald's pulses beat more freely as the hissing shot whistled through his Highland bonnet, sending one of the long black feathers which adorned it floating away on the evening breeze.

"Praise be to the Lord in Heaven! ye have escaped," said Evan, fervently. "But it's your turn now, sir: level low, and if the muzzle rises, you'll be sure to wing him like ony muir-cock; and mony a gude thousand we've bagged thegither in Strathonan, and mony mair we'll bag gin we get ower this awfu' adventure."

"*Dios y Demonios!* some demon of hell has turned aside my hand. I have shot at a score, and never yet swerved in my aim," cried the condé, in a hoarse tone of anger and surprise, when as the smoke cleared off he beheld his antagonist still standing erect before him. "No, by Santiago! I never missed before. You have stood my discharge bravely, senor cavalier; but my courage is not less than your own. Fire!" he cried, laying his hand upon his heart.

"Noo, Maister Ronald,—noo, sir! O, be calm; may be ye'll never hae sic anither chance. This chield looks unco saucy; but mind ye the auld proverb, 'Ilka cock craws crouse on its ain middenstead.' It's most awfu' wark this for a Sabbath evening; but oh, sir! level low; mark the buckle o' his waist-belt, and if the piece throws high, like the ither, the braw dies at his button-holes stand a bad chance." Evan spoke in an anxious and hurried tone, while he eyed the condé with no slight feeling of hatred and animosity. Ronald levelled his pistol at the tall and finely-formed figure of his brave opponent, who surveyed him steadily, without a muscle of his noble features changing.

"I can never thus coldly shoot so fine a fellow," thought the generous Highlander, and fired his weapon in the air. An exclamation of sorrow from Evan, and another of angry surprise from the Spaniard, followed the report.

"*Santos Santissimos!* what mean you by this? Am I unworthy of being fired at? You have most grossly insulted me by this action, senor; and you ought to have considered the very great honour I did you in becoming personally your antagonist."

"How! Don Balthazzar; honour?"

"Certainly. Save myself, perhaps, no cavalier of noble lineage, or a long-transmitted name, would have condescended to contend thus openly in arms with a stranger, whose birth and blood are both obscure. No, senor! a dagger-thrust from a dark corner would have put an end to our rivalry. But think not to escape; for, by our Lady of the Rock in Leon,* we part not this day until the sod smokes with the blood of one or other of us,—so defend yourself!" He unsheathed his long cavalry sword, and rushed so suddenly upon Ronald, that the latter had barely time to draw and parry his impetuous onset. So fierce was his

* A much-frequented image of the Virgin Mary, on a mountain called the Rock of France, between the city of Salamanca and Rodrigo, in Leon. It stood there, or still stands in a building, which is, I believe, a monastery of Dominican friars.

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stroke, that the arm of the Highlander tingled to the very shoulder when their keen blades clashed together; and so much was he infuriated at this unlooked for assault, that for some moments he struck blindly and at random, whirling his heavy claymore round his head like a willow wand, and having many narrow escapes from the sharp-pointed blade of the Spaniard, who retained his temper and presence of mind admirably. Ronald soon found the necessity of being cool likewise, and using art as well as courage. In the fashion of the Highland swordsman, he placed forward his right foot with a long stride, presenting it as a tempting object for a blow, while he narrowly watched the eye of his adversary, who instantly dealt a sweeping stroke at the defenceless limb, which the young Gael withdrew with the rapidity of lightning, bestowing at the same time a blow on the condé, which broke the shell of his Toledo and wounded his right hand severely. He dropped his shattered weapon.

"Claymore for ever!" shouted Evan, triumphantly capering about, snapping his fingers, whooping and hallooing in a truly Highland style, so overjoyed was he to see his master victorious. "Claymore for ever and aye! bonnily dune,—bravely dune. Sir Wallace himself couldna hae matched him better. It was my puir auld faither learned ye that trick, Maister Ronald; and God be thanked it's a' ower noo, and that your skin is a haill ane."

The discomfited cavalier bestowed on him a proud look, at once withering and disdainful.

"Noble senor," said he, turning to Ronald, "you have this day vanquished one of the most accomplished of King Ferdinand's cavalry officers: in fact, senor, I am one of the best swordsmen in all the ten provinces of Spain; and to disarm me thus, is no small feat for so young a soldier, and I honour you for it. Catalina de Villa Franca must be—but strike! Fortune has placed my life a second time at your absolute disposal: take it; for I swear by every saint on our monkish muster-rolls, I will have no ignominious terms dictated to me, even though disarmed and at your mercy. So strike the blow that will free you from me for ever."

"Never! gallant condé. This quarrel was your own seeking, and I forgive you for it freely, and for the many insults you have offered me."

"*Senor officiale*, you are too generous: no cavalier or rival in Spain would lose the chance you cast away so carelessly."

"Evan, hand this gentleman his sword. And now, condé, we must look to your wound. I trust it is not a severe one?"

"Pho! 'tis a mere scratch."

"Yet it bleeds much."

"*Carajo!* it does—more than I wish it to do. But, senor, I have received so many wounds in different ways, and have bled so much, that I marvel I have any blood left in me at all."

"I regret that the cut is so severe," said Ronald, as the condé held up his hand, from which the blood streamed freely.

"Pho! senor; to express regret, though it may appear very generous, is folly. A few minutes since, we would with pleasure have passed our blades through each others hearts—but that feeling is past now. Ho! Mendizabal. Rogue! why do you tarry! Bind up this quickly, and let me be gone. I have lost much time already, and Carlos d'Espana will scarcely get the despatches within the appointed time." The wound was tied up hastily, so impatient was Don Balthas-

sar to be gone; and a strange excitement and irritability possessed him now, instead of his former coolness and self-possession.

The moment it was over, he sharply scrutinized his saddle-girths and harness-buckles; after which he vaulted with the grace of a true horseman upon the back of his noble Spanish charger, which had stood by unmoved during the conflict between its rider and Ronald Stuart.

"Senor," said the condé to the latter, in a low but emphatic voice, "our quarrel is ended amicably for the present, but perhaps we may meet again. Do not think that a cavalier of old Castile will thus easily resign to another so fair a prize as Catalina de Villa Franca. No, senor; I must live for her, or learn to die for Spain."

He dashed the sharp rowels into his horse's flanks, tearing the very skin; and forcing the animal to leap a ruined wall, fully six feet high, he vanished from their sight, and rode madly and recklessly towards the centre street of the city. A few minutes more, and they beheld his glittering accoutrements flashing in the evening sun, as he plunged forward at the same furious speed beyond the walls of the city, and disappeared over the eminences in the direction of Albuquerque.

"He is a gallant fellow," thought Ronald, who watched him until he disappeared, "and a noble example he has given me. To him I have almost unwittingly acted that part, which now Hyndford acts to me. But for Truxillo—I have nothing to regret; I have acted honourably towards him; and in my own heart I thank God that this quarrel is ended amicably, and with so little damage."

An interruption now occurred to Evan's expressions of joy for the safety of his master, who, although most interested in the fortunate issue of the duel, cared indeed least about it. For his attendance, Doctor Mendizabal had received from Ronald a *doblon*, or *onza*, a coin worth about £3. 10*s*. English; and as it was the first time in his life that he had ever received so great a fee, his thanks, his protestations, and the sweeps he made with his sombrero, were innumerable; and he had just taken his departure, when Sargento Gomez scrambled hurriedly over the ruinous walls, and leaping into the sort of court where they stood, advanced towards Ronald with a Spanish military salute.

"Noble senor," said he, breathlessly, "I have been in search of you over the whole of Merida—"

"My life on't, anither fechtin' job!" ejaculated Evan, who saw Pedro was highly excited, although he knew not a word he uttered. "Oot wi't, Gomez, in some decent tongue a body can comprehend."

"A muleteer has within this hour arrived from Fuente del Maistre, and says he saw a party of French cavalry advancing down this side of the Guadiana. Donna Catalina wishes to see you immediately. You must fly, senor, if you would escape being made prisoner."

"French cavalry! How can it be possible? Yet Evelyn, of the 13th, said something about it, which I have forgotten. Can the veracity of your informant be relied on?"

"He is true to death, senor! He is my own brother, Lazaro Gomez, of Merida, and an honester muleteer will not be found on the road between Madrid and Alcantara—and that is one of many leagues in length. He has had the honour to be employed more than once by my Lord Wellington, as a spy upon Marshal Soult and Marmont."

"A recommendation, truly! Are the enemy in force?"

"He said two or three troops, senor—Dembrowski's lancers."

"Sir Rowland Hill is retiring on Merida. Did your brother Lazaro see any sign of his troops?"

"No, senor."

"'Tis very unaccountable how they have outflanked our division in this manner."

"Senor, they must have advanced by some secret way pointed out by some of those traitorous banditti which infest every sierra and wood just now. These fellows would hang their mother for a maravedi; so 'tis no wonder they are often false to Spain."

"These lancers must inevitably be captured by Sir Rowland's advanced guard, which cannot be far off now."

"True, senor; but you may either be killed or taken captive before the British come up—and so may I, as a Spanish soldier. We must retire westwards to Albuquerque. But come, senor; Donna Catalina—"

"Yonder they come, by heavens!" cried Ronald, as a cloud of dust and the glitter of accoutrements appeared about two or three miles off, advancing rapidly towards Merida by the river side. "We shall have to retire without delay; but I must first bid the ladies adieu. Get your harness, Pedro; and though there are but three of us, we will not surrender, even to them, without firing a shot."

"Viva!" cried the Spaniard, tossing his red forage-cap into the air, and leaping up to catch it again. "Viva, noble senor! I will follow you to death, even as I would the noble cavalier who commands my troop, or King Ferdinand the Seventh himself."

Descending from the ruins of the fortress, they entered the city, where all was terror, confusion, and dismay at the unexpected appearance of the enemy, whose numbers were exaggerated, and declared to be the whole of Marshal Ney's division, and which, according to report, had utterly annihilated the British under Sir Rowland Hill. Most of the inhabitants were taking to flight, laden with their bedding and clothing,—matters which a Spaniard ranks among his most valuable goods and chattels. Hundreds of men, bearing burdens of every sort, were pressing towards the western gate, followed by women, whose lamentations were mingled with many a bitter "*carajo*" against the invaders of their soil. Among others appeared Doctor Mendizabal, carrying a carbine in one hand, while with the other he led by the bridle a stout mule, on which were seated his wife and two children. Others led mules and donkeys laden with all kinds of household stuff, and a dense press ensued among the crowd about the city gate, and loud curses of anger and impatience were uttered on all sides at the delay in front, the intense pressure from the continually increasing mass behind permitting but few to get out at a time.

At length a passage was made through the dense column by the arrival of an important personage,—the corregidor, or chief magistrate of the city, surrounded by several alguazils in broad-leaved sombreros, wearing the livery of the city, and armed with long halberts, or Spanish blunderbusses with brass bell-mouths. The corregidor was a grave old hidalgo, wearing a large military cocked-hat and long moustaches twisted up to his ears; he was muffled in a large brown cloak, and smoked his cigar, while he surveyed with an unmoved eye the crowd, where almost every face wore the expression of terror, rage, impatience, and dismay. However, all fell back on the right and left, as his old-fashioned coach, with its emblazoned coats armorial, and drawn by a

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single mule, advanced towards the gate. Mounted on another mule rode a livery servant, wearing a red feather in his sombrero, a stiletto in his sash, and armed with an enormous whip, which was never a moment idle, being continually at work either among the people to make them give way, or on his cattle to make them increase their speed, and place as great a distance as possible between himself and the dreaded legions of France. This servant rode alongside of the mule which drew the vehicle, leading it by the bridle, the usual custom in Spain, and one which is truly very awkward and unsightly.

At the gate of the garden Ronald was met by the young ladies, who both advanced hastily towards him, exclaiming, "O Don Ronald! have you heard—"

"They are in sight—"

O *Madre de Dios!* you will be either killed, or taken a prisoner over the Pyrenees to France."

"To escape either of these fates, I must bid you instantly adieu, senoritas,—unless you will consent to retire with me from Merida, which will scarcely be a safe place for you while the French are in it. The advancing party are some of Dombrouski's Polish lancers, who are not famous for their sentiments either of chivalry or gentle courtesy. They are rough dogs, I understand; and in gallantry, are far inferior to the brave cavalry of France."

"Oh, they are sad fellows, these lancers, and wear frightful whiskers; but we do not fear them, senor," replied Inesella in her usual laughing tone. "You must know that the Condé d'Erlon, who is one of my many most humble and devoted admirers, gave me a written protection the last time he was here, and all soldiers who march under the tricolour of France must respect and obey it; therefore, we do not fear them—quite the reverse. Some of the French are very gay cavaliers, and I knew a very handsome chasseur——But, pho! poor fellow! he was assassinated with some others at Albuquerque."

"Then, Donna Inesella, you fear not to remain. And will your letter protect your cousin?"

"O yes, senor, it protects all who are with me; but of course you—"

"Must depart at once."

"Exactly, senor; old D'Erlon's letter will not protect you, who are his enemy."

"Then, senoritas, now for flight," replied Ronald, tightening his sash and belt. "I must abandon my baggage to your charge. The citizens are nearly all off *en route* for the north and west, and all the church bells are tolling dismally. But I trust Sir Rowland Hill's advanced guard will be here by to-morrow, and if so, our cavalry under General Long will soon capture this handful of lancers."

"They appear, however, to have scared away my fiery brother, the condé; he galloped furiously down the street a few minutes since, nearly riding over a poor old padre (protect us, Heaven!), and left the town, without even bidding us adieu, although Catalina called to him from the street balcony."

"Alas! Inesella," said Catalina, "your prattle will detain him here too long, and every moment is fraught with danger."

"Holy Virgin, I hope not! Do not compromise your safety by tarrying longer here, senor. Take the road for the forest of La Nava, and Pedro Gomez will direct you. The Mother of God keep her holy hand over you, brave cavalier! for we may never meet again."

"Farewell! *senor mio.* We have been very happy in Merida," said

Catalina, in a voice of assumed firmness, and presenting her white hand, while her lip quivered and her cheek turned very pale. At that moment the distant sound of a cavalry trumpet was borne towards them on the passing breeze.

"Come awa, sir; we mesunna bide a minute mair,—it's just a temptin' o' Providence," urged Evan, examining his flint as he stood at the garden gate with Pedro Gomez, who was armed with his carbine, and had donned his helmet and accoutrements.

"Gude by to ye, leddies," added the Highlander, touching his bonnet; "and mony thoosand thanks to ye for your kindness to my maister in this unco hole o' a place."

"Keep this for my sake, fair Catalina, and think of me sometimes, when I am far away from you," said Ronald, casting his tartan plaid over her white shoulders as a parting gift; and kissing her pale brow, and her cousin's hand, he retired hastily from the garden, followed by the soldiers.

CHAPTER XIV.

MULETEERS.

"I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more, is none."

Macbeth.

The red sun was setting amidst a sea of light floating clouds, which displayed a thousand blending shades of purple, saffron, and gold, shedding the same warm hues on the scenery around Merida, tinging every object of the beautiful landscape, through which, meandering between dark green groves of the orange and olive, wound the slowly rolling and broad-bosomed Guadiana, seeming like a flood of lucid gold, in which the objects on its sides were reflected downwards, the changing sky above and the black round arches of the noble bridge all appearing inverted in the bosom of the stream, as on the surface of a polished mirror.

The dark shadows of the neighbouring mountain were falling across the plain and the city, rendering yet darker the gloomy and antique streets, where all was still confusion and dismay and from which the chant of the ecclesiastics, and the deep ding-dong of the tolling bells were borne on the wind towards them, mingled with the shouts of the advancing cavalry, who came on in a clamorous style truly French. Suddenly the dark mass emerged from among the trees which had concealed their approach, and galloped across the bridge some hundred in number, with accoutrements glittering, plumes waving, and their tri-coloured pennons fluttering from the heads of their lofty lances.

"Now, then," exclaimed Ronald, as the last file disappeared from the bridge, "we must strain every nerve to gain the wood of La Nava. A party of these lancers may be sent forward to scour the roads, and we are very far from safe yet."

"Courage, senor: 'tis but a couple of leagues or so from hence, and I am well assured that no patrol will they send out while there is a single wine-house unsacked in Merida."

"Cast away your knapsack, Evan: you will get another when we re-

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join. It is an encumbrance to you, so toss it away. Let us but gain the shelter of the wood, and we will there await, in safety, the arrival of our own troops, as they pass *en route* for Portugal."

Evan took his knapsack by the straps, and cast it into a deep pool by the way side, saying it was better "A' should gang that gate, than fa' into the hands o' uncanny folk."

About eight miles from Merida they met Lazaro Gomez, the brother of Pedro, and a party of muleteers of Catalonia, halted at a fountain which babbled through an iron pipe fixed into the rock, from which the water gushed, and fell into a little pebbled basin. Near it stood an ancient stone cross, marking the tomb of one of Don Alvaro's ancestors, who reposed here in unconsecrated ground. In the course of centuries it had sunk deep into the earth; but on the upper part yet appeared the time-worn and half-obliterated inscription:—

AQUI YACE.

EL NOBLE CABELLERO D. JUAN DE VILLA FRANCA,
.... MUERTOS .... BATALLA ANO D. 1128.
RUEGUEN A DIOS POR EL!

This fountain and ancient tomb had been the object of many an evening ride with Catalina, who related the history of Don Juan, a romance which I may give to the public at some future time. Ronald paid but little attention to either the cross or brook, but advanced towards the jovial muleteers, who were smoking paper cigars of their own manufacture—laughing, singing, and drinking *aquardiente* to wash down their repast of bread, onions, and *bacallao*, oil and lettuce, which was spread on the sward by the side of the fountain; around which, cropping the herbage, wandered their mules, from whose harness jingled a thousand little tinkling bells. On the approach of the British officer, the frank fellows sprung to their feet with one accord, and held their brimming horns towards him, while he was greeted with many *vivas* and sweeps of their sombreros.

"Senor cavalier, I am glad you have escaped our enemies by means of the intelligence I brought to Merida," said Lazaro Gomez, the master-muleteer, a short, thick-set fellow, with a round bullet-head and good-humoured face, containing that roguish sort of expression which is always given by artists to the features of Sancho Panza. He was tanned to the colour of mahogany by continual exposure to the sun, and his chin displayed a short stunted black beard, and slovenly ill-trimmed moustache.

"I am much obliged to you indeed, Master Lazaro; and I would that it was in my power to reward you."

"Mention not reward, I beg of you, senor cavalier," replied Lazaro, making another sweep with his sombrero. Ronald answered by a grave bow. He had become too much accustomed to the appellation of "cavalier," and the pompous politeness of the Spaniards, even to smile when he was addressed in a style that would pass better with the renowned Cid, Rodrigo of Bivar, than Ronald Stuart of the Gordon Highlanders.

"But you must condescend to drink with us, senor," said a muleteer. "My horn is filled with the best aquardiente."

"Viva el Rey!" said Ronald, in a complimentary tone, as he emptied the cup.

"Viva el Rey!" cried the others, draining their liquor to the dregs.

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"Evan," observed Ronald, "you will relish this beverage; 'tis somewhat like our own mountain dew at home."

"It smells o' the peat reek, sir," said Evan, snuffing with his nose over the horn which Lazaro had given him. "Sour water, I declare! perfect fushionless water," said the young Highlandman, after he had drunk it all off, however. "Meeserable trash! O'd, sir, I wadna gie a gill stoup fu' o' what Alpin Oig used to brew wi' the sma' still in the hole at Coir-nan Taischatrin, for a loch fu' o' this agyerdent, as ye ca' it."

"How is this, Lazaro?" asked Pedro, observing that Evan disliked the liquor. "Have you nothing else but muddy aquardiente to offer to honest soldiers? Come, my jovial brother, broach us one of those bloated pig-skins, which are piled on the backs of your mules there?"

"Our Lady del Pilar! a modest request," replied Lazaro. "Why, brother Pedro, bethink you. I cannot touch the burdens of my cattle—they are the property of others. Could I broach a skin, our best would be at the service of the noble cavalier. And as for our aquardiente, I avouch, by the head of his Holiness! that better never came out of Catalonia."

"I may pretend to be a judge," said the soldier, "as I have drunk some thousand flasks of it; and avouch, in return, 'tis muddy as the Tajo in a shower, and only fit for a Portuguese or a dog to drink!"

"Never mind, Lazaro; your aquardiente is most excellent," observed Ronald, seating himself by the gushing fountain, and partaking of the bread and bacallao, or dried cod-fish, which composed their simple fare. "Your mules seem heavily laden: how far do you mean to travel to-night?"

"As far as the first posada on the road to Majorga."

"What do your cattle carry in these large packages?"

"Oh! senor, many things; principally flour, rice, corn, pulse, and wine and oil in skins. These commodities we have brought from the centre of Catalonia and Arragon, and are carrying to the frontiers of Portugal, to sell among the British troops. We hope to find a good market at the camp before Ciudad Rodrigo, in the kingdom of Leon."

"Catalonia and Arragon, did you say? How! These provinces are in possession of the French troops!"

"True, senor; but we muleteers have ways of our own, by which we evade the out-picquets and foraging parties of the enemy."

"Such as——"

"Travelling fast all night, and concealing ourselves closely all day,—and a hundred other modes. Senor, we would evade Satan himself, did he lay snares for us. We muleteers are cunning fellows!"

"You speak truly," observed Pedro. "A Spanish muleteer is a strange being, and one that is as wily and active as a serpent; but they are happy fellows, I assure you, senor, and like no other men that I know of. A muleteer makes his home everywhere, because he is for ever wandering over all wide Spain. Cracking his whip and his joke, he travels with a light heart over our long dusty plains, and through the deep passes of the lofty hills and sierras, singing merrily to the jingle of his mules' bells, stopping only to smack his wine-horn or the lips of the peasant girls, whom he loves almost as well as his mules,—only *almost*, senor, because he loves his mules better than himself. He gives them fine names; he scolds, talks, kisses, and sings to them, to cheer them by the way; and at the posada or the

bivouac he provides for their wants before he looks after his own. *Caramba!* were I not a soldier, I would certainly become a jolly muleteer. He is a droll fellow indeed,—soft-hearted and hard-headed, but always honest, and true as the sun, senor."

"You have made a most excellent panegyric upon them, Pedro," remarked Ronald, when the soldier had stopped to take breath, and the shout of laughter which his observations called forth from the muleteers had subsided.

"Our Lady del Pilar! good, good! Well said, Pedro; you deserve another horn for that," cried the master-muleteer. "But if it please you, draw some distinction between us and the muleteers of Valencia, who are none of the best,—in fact the veriest rogues in all Spain. They would cheat the holy Virgin herself, were she to traffic with them. But talking of rogues, senor, if you would travel with us to Majorga, we should be proud of the honour of your company, and in truth you may find some advantage in ours."

"Why so, Master Lazaro?"

"The ruinous chapel of Santa Lucia, in the cork-forest yonder, has become the haunt of some deperadoes for this week past,—fellows who are very unscrupulous whom they attack or encounter, and with us, who are all stout and honest men, and well armed to boot,"—every man had a *trabuco* or blunderbuss with a brass bell-muzzle slung across his back,—"you will be in greater safety. Our escort is not to be despised in these perilous times."

"I thank you for your offer and advice; but as I mean to await in this neighbourhood the arrival of our troops, it would not suit me to travel so far westward as Majorga, and so I care not to take my chance of encountering the thieves in the wood yonder. My Highland follower will of course, stand by me; and Pedro will, I suppose, likewise."

"May I be blasted by a curse if I do not, senor!" The muleteers clapped their hands in applause.

"Are the rogues numerous?" asked Ronald.

"Three or four, senor; but stoutly armed desperadoes, and led by a regular demon, long well known as a frontier guerilla, whose only delight was slaughter and war to the knife! A fellow that could eat fire, as the proverb says, and upon whom lead and steel were alike ineffectual."

"We will put him to the test, if he crosses our path. I never heard of a hide yet, unless covered by steel, that was proof against the point of a claymore. Three or four, did you say? We are but three; but then we are soldiers, you know, and are alone worth a dozen such as these fellows you speak of. But what has caused a gallant guerilla to turn robber?"

"Why, senor, 'tis a long story; and we had it yesterday from a poor muleteer of Codeciera, whom the villains rifled of his mules and every maravedi in his pouch,—the devil confound them for it!"

"Well, and this guerilla—"

"Kept a wine-house in Albuquerque; but for some attempt to assassinate the famous cavalier Don Alvaro de Villa Franca, his goods were confiscated to King Ferdinand by the corregidor's order. On finding himself a penniless outlaw, he took his musket and dagger, and turned bandit—keeping himself in the desert places of the forest of Albuquerque and the Sierra de Montanches for some weeks past. Now he has begun to collect followers, and has stationed himself in

the wood of La Nava, rendering its neighbourhood anything but a safe one."

"Go on, Lazaro," said Ronald eagerly; "his name is—"

"Narvaez Cifuentes—a fellow I never much liked, although I have emptied some thousand horns at his casa. But what is the matter, noble senor; surely I have not offended you?"

Ronald's eyes sparkled with stern delight, and true Highland fury swelled within his breast, at the intelligence that Cifuentes was so near; and his wild reckless spirit and love of adventure made him instantly resolve to search the wood and confront his hated enemy, at all risks and hazards.

"Evan—Evan! the daring wretch who attempted to assassinate me is lurking among the dingles of the wood yonder. I will seek him out and take vengeance on him, or perish. He has but three armed villains with him: you will, of course, follow me?"

"Sir, I wadna be my faither's son, if I didna follow whare'er ye led the way," replied Evan, testily. "The venture's no' what I would just like; folk shouldna tempt danger or Providence, but follow ye I will as long as I can draw breath; and, troth, I would amaist gie up my hope o' salvation, to hae but a chance at the infernal riever wi' my firelock!"

To Pedro and the muleteer, who were surprised at his sudden excitement, Ronald related all he knew of Cifuentes; and during the narrative he was interrupted by many an indignant "*carajo*" and malediction on the wine-seller. When he had finished, the muleteers declared with one voice, that if they had not their mules to attend to they would have followed him into the wood and assisted him to attack the haunt of the robbers among the ruins, and to kill or capture his enemy; but Pedro, animated by the natural daring of a Spaniard, and as a soldier of Spain considering it his duty to follow Ronald as an officer of the allies, he at once volunteered frankly to attend him in his rash undertaking.

The evening had begun to deepen into the darker shadows of night; and the pale evening star, twinkling amidst the blushing blaze of the western sky, had risen above the wood of La Nava, when the sturdy muleteers, collecting their beasts of burden, moved off with much noise, jollity, and cracking of whips, in the direction of the place where they meant to pass the night—an inn on the road to Majorga. Ronald Stuart bade them farewell, and receiving many honest wishes for success, parted from them; and, followed by his two soldiers, left the fountain, making straight for the cork-forest, the dark foliage of which lay involved in "a brown horror" before them.

It was a clear and beautiful moonlight night when they reached the skirts of the wood, whence, on looking back, they beheld a red light, which spread over the sky, rising in the direction of Merida, telling that the French were at their old work—pillage and ruthless devastation. Stuart trembled for the safety of the fair friends he had left behind, and earnestly trusted that the Count d'Erlon's letter would protect them from insult or outrage.

"Braw wark at Merida this bonnie nicht, sir," observed Evan, giving a last look to the rear ere they plunged into the recesses of the forest. "My certie! the very lift seems a' in a low, the clouds are red wi' streaks o' fire; and here's Pedro, puir gomeril! he is like to gang clean daft at the sicht o't."

"You would not be in a very pleasant humour yourself, Evan, were

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you to see the clachan of Strathfillan, or the 'fair city' of Perth, blazing by the hands of invaders; and Jessie Cavers, perhaps—ay, even your Jessie, carried off like a stricken deer across the saddle-bow of a French dragoon."

"Sic waefu' things will never happen at hame in auld Scotland, God be praised for't! never, sir, while oor men are made o' the stuff they are; the broad-sword has bent, but it has not yet broken! But it's unco droll to hear how Pedro, puir chield, havers to himsel."

Unaware of how he was listened to, Pedro Gomez ground his teeth with ill-concealed rage, while he invoked the curses of San Juan, San Geronimo, and a hundred others, not forgetting our Holy Lady of Majorga, on the enemy. This vituperation appeared to give him a deal of comfort; and thus consoling himself, he led them on towards the ruins of Santa Lucia, by a pathway with which he was well acquainted. It was so narrow that only one could pass at a time, and so much intersected, crossed, and barred, by brambles, bushes, and foliage, that they had infinite trouble in proceeding at all. It led them into a deeper and denser part of the forest, the dewy branches of which were now in full foliage; the waving leaves were glittering in a thousand hues and shades of green, as the pale moonbeams fell on them, streaming in a gush of silver light on the glistening grass, or down the dark dingles, as they pushed aside the heavy branches in their progress, tearing the nets of silvery gauze which many a busy spider was weaving from tree to tree in the merry moonlight.

"For ony sake, Pedro, haud your wheesht, man!" exclaimed the Scottish soldier, impatiently; "it's enough to mak' a body eerie to hear ye growling and yammering that gate, in siccan a dismal place as this. O'd, sir, I never heard ony ane blatter sic words, exceptin' the auld lawyer body at Almendrelauchy, when Angus Mackie and mysel had a fecht wi' him. Would ye like to hear that story, sir?" he added, turning to his master.

"No, not at present," was the reply; "we must move in silence, else 'tis useless to move at all. Look well to your flint and priming, and keep your lock clear of bushes. Should a musket be discharged, it would alarm the thieves, on whom I wish to steal unperceived, if possible." Ronald repeated these injunctions in the Spanish language, as indeed he had to do most of his observations, and they now advanced in perfect silence, following the intricate windings of the narrow track, which in former days had been a well-beaten road to the sequestered chapel of the forest, the fame of whose *relicario* drew, in ancient times, scores of devout pilgrims at certain seasons. As the pathway was now more open, Ronald took the lead.

It was certainly a rash and daring attempt to enter thus a wood, every pass of which was unknown to them, and at night, on such an errand, to search for so formidable a desperado as Narvaez Cifuentes,—a name which is yet a bugbear to the children of Estremadura, and used by their mothers to *frighten* them to sleep; more especially as the number of his followers was doubtful, and it was only certain that they would all be equally desperate and ferocious as himself. But Ronald's bold blood was up, and his eagerness to take vengeance upon him for the recent wound that his hand had inflicted, and the pain and suffering which that wound had caused, rendered him blind to what might be the probable consequences.

Alice's desertion of him for a higher born and more wealthy lover had rendered him careless of life, prompt to encounter and utterly

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regardless of any danger, which was proved by the cold insensibility with which he conducted himself during his duel with the condé. That native spirit of daring which exists in the bosom of every mountaineer, and which he possessed in no slight degree, likewise spurred him on; and thinking not of the rash manner in which he was perilling his own life and the lives of his friends, he continued to penetrate resolutely into the most gloomy part of the wood.

"Eh! gude guide us! what is that, sir?" exclaimed Iverach, charging his musket breast high, while he started back in dismay as some huge animal arose from its lair, upon which they had encroached, and dashing furiously past them, swept through the forest glade like a tempest.

"What an awfu' like beast to meet in siccan errie a place!"

"Many such have we shot at home on the green braes of Strathonan and side of Benmore. Is it possible that you knew not what it was?"

Evan was abashed, and trod on without replying, while he was sadly incommoded by the rough brambles and stunted bushes, which tore his bare legs, where left uncovered by the tartan kilt and gartered hose.

"Senor," said Pedro, "what a noble deer it was that rushed past us just now!"

"Ay, faith! and a splendid mark for a single ball at a range of forty yards or so; but I am surprised to find it here in a cork-forest."

"It must have come down from the Sierra de Montanches, for there, and among the high mountains of Guadalupe, many thousands of gallant deer and the dark brown roe-buck rove about in freedom."

Their attention was now attracted by a strange noise, which seemed to approach them in front: it was a series of sounds, in tone something between the snorting growl of some wild animal and the squeaking of young swine. Ronald, who had never heard such noises before, was very much surprised, and kept his hand on the hilt of his sword; but poor Evan's nerves were sadly discomposed, and he felt every hair on his scalp bristling under his bonnet, as the dismal remembrance of the many awful beings who peopled the Coirnan Taischatrin, and every thicket and corrie about Lochisla, rushed upon his mind. All the stories he had heard of the dreadful water-horse that dwelt in the castle loch (and which his father the piper beheld one clear moonlight night floating on the surface of the placid water, as he was returning from a *dredgie*), of the little fairies who lived under the green holms of Corrie-avon, and the yet more terrible white woman who haunted the black muir of Strathonan and howled to the wind the live-long night, all crowded horribly upon his memory, and the perspiration burst forth from every pore, as something like a legion of flying devils swept tumultuously past them, and plunging into the underwood disappeared, squeaking, growling, and tearing the bushes to fragments in their wild career.

"Pedro! What are all these, in the devil's name?" cried Ronald, starting back and half unsheathing his weapon.

"Only a herd of wild swine, senor," replied Pedro with a laugh. "*Demonios* one fellow has given a stroke with his tusk in passing, which I little like."

"'Twas only a drove of wild pigs," said Ronald. "Cheer up, Evan; surely you were not frightened? Yet you seem very pale in the moonlight."

"Frightened, said ye, sir?" replied, or rather asked, Evan indignantly, but feeling considerably re-assured the while "frightened!

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the deil a bit, sir. But I never got sic a start in a' my born days syne the nicht the howlet gied me a flaff wi' its wing, when we took Maister Macquirk ower to the ruins on the Kirk-inch. Ye'll mind o'd, sir; he was living wi' the auld laird for a day or twa at the tower, and we rowed him ower the loch in the boat, to gie a look o' the bonnie ruins in the moonlicht."

"Macquirk!" reiterated Ronald, the name recalling a disagreeable passage in his father's letter.

"Ay, sir, Maister Macquirk,—a pleasant smooth-spoken gentleman, as a' Edinburgh writer-folk are. Eh! God be wi' us, sir! what's this noo? Mair wild pigs, I declare!" cried he in considerable trepidation.

"Pshaw! Evan. Your father, old Donald, has made a complete old wife of you, by his horrible legends and stories."

"It's no for me, sir, to—— But it's just a temptin' o' Providence to be—"

"Hush! 'tis only the barking of dogs. Tread softly, and keep close under the darkest shadows of the foliage."

"There is a man yonder, senor,—evidently a sentinel," whispered Pedro in a low voice.

"Where?" asked Ronald, as they halted.

"About thirty paces off."

"Under the dark tree?"

"Ay, senor,—the moon shines full upon him."

"Keep close in the gloom; he sees us now, I think."

The figure of a man armed with a long musket appeared clearly, as the bright radiance of the moon streamed down the narrow path, glittering on the butts of his pistols and hilt of the poniard stuck in the worsted sash which was twisted round his waist. He wore a long slouched cap, which hung down his back, and various tassels, ribbons, and gewgaws of gold lace that adorned his short velvet jacket glimmered in the moonlight.

"*Quien vive?*" challenged he, like a Spanish sentinel, while he stooped his ear towards the ground, listening intensely for a few seconds. He appeared to have heard something. It was Evan's feet rustling among the last year's leaves. The robber stood erect, and cocked his musket while he looked forward into the gloom, a passing cloud having obscured the face of the moon.

"*Carajo! Quien vive? Amigos ó enemigos?*" he repeated, the sonorous tones of his voice re-echoing in the dingles of the wood, and arousing the fierce growling of some dogs near at hand.

"This is one of the villains, senor, bedecked in all his ill-gotten finery."

"We must despatch him," answered Ronald in a fierce whisper, his natural impetuosity becoming roused; "we must rid ourselves of him, but how?"

"Quietly, senor,—leave him to me. Every man lost to the enemy is one gained to us,—so says Murillo, and he—"

"Pshaw! never mind Murillo. This fellow must be settled warily, if we would steal upon the rest. What would you advise? He certainly hears us, and should he fire in this direction, one of us may be knocked on the head. I will rush on him, and disarm or cut him down in a twinkling."

"Nay, noble senor; his outcry would be as mischievous as the discharge of his musket; the ruins of the chapel are close at hand, remember. Leave him to me," was Pedro's answer, while he coolly

displayed the blade of a long Spanish knife, which flashed as he drew it, and, gliding from Ronald's side, advanced softly towards the brigand under the shadow of the trees.

The challenge of the bandit again sounded through the lonely wood.

"*Cuidado, amigos mios; cuidado?*" he added in a voice of taunt and warning, but evidently while he was uncertain whether or not any one had approached his post. He drew his thumb-nail cautiously across the sharp edge of his flint, he raised his musket to his shoulder, and was about to fire in the direction of the place where Ronald and Evan stood concealed. Another second would perhaps have sealed the fate of one of them, when the stiletto of the dragoon glittered near him in the pale moonlight,—a heavy blow was given, and a deep groan succeeded; the robber fell dying upon the sward, while his musket only flashed in the pan, and fell rattling from his grasp without doing damage. Ronald rushed towards the spot, and found the blood-thirsty sargento wiping his deadly weapon with scrupulous accuracy, while he kept his foot upon the yet warm, though breathless corpse of the man he had destroyed. The light of the moon fell with a cold and ghastly lustre on the pale and rigid, yet very fine features of the dead man, becoming contracted and fierce with the recent death-struggle. His white and up-turned eyes shone with a terrible glare as the moon-beams fell on them, and altogether there was something sad and appalling in the sudden manner in which this desperado had been hurled into eternity, with all his unrepented and manifold sins upon his head.

"Awfu' work this, sir!" said Evan, with a shudder, while he surveyed the stark and bold features of the slain, around whom a black pool formed by his blood lay increasing. "A dour-looking chield he is, wi' a gloom on his brow that would suit Rob Roy himsel."

"I would to Heaven, Gomez," observed the equally excited Stuart, "you had found some other mode of silencing him than this; there is somewhat in it at which I revolt."

The Spaniard laughed grimly.

"Senor," said he, "the man was only a robber; and when old Murillo gets hold of such he hangs them by scores at a time, and I have seen a stout beech bending under a load of such devil's fruit. Pho! senor, it matters not. We are now close upon the ruins of the chapel, and the villains who harbour there have some formidable allies, —mastiff dogs. I hear them growling, and I assure you, senor, that a demon may be as easily dealt with as a Spanish hound. You will require all your resolution and energy to—"

"I do not mean to relinquish the search, after having proceeded so far," replied Ronald, interrupting the Spaniard, at whose tone he felt a little piqued. "I assure you, Sargento Gomez, 'tis not the sight of a little blood that will make the heart of a Scottish Highlander fail."

"I meant not to offend, senor; but let us proceed. The ruins of Santa Lucia are some twenty yards from this."

"Forward, then,—lead on."

Ronald in passing possessed himself of the dead man's loaded musket and well-filled pouch of ball cartridges, an acquisition on which he had soon reason to congratulate himself.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE BANDITTI.

"'Tis na' for nought, bauld Duncan cried,
Sic shoutings on the wind:
Then up he started frae his seat,
A thrang of spears behind.

Haste, haste, my valiant hearts, he said,
Anes mair to follow me:
We'll meet these shouters by the burn,—
I guess wha they may be."

Duncan: a Fragment.

Treading softly and warily, they came to an opening in the wood, and found themselves close upon the ruins of the ancient structure. It occupied the summit of a grassy mound, which sloped down on all sides, and where the mouldered remains of some ancient crosses and tombstones lay half sunk and buried among the long rank grass. The chapel had almost disappeared; little remained save the crypt; and at intervals, amid a heap of shattered stones, arose tall ornamented buttresses (surviving the intermediate walls), their summits glimmering in the moonlight, which streamed through loopholes and yawning rents in the massive masonry, showing the weeds and grass which waved in every nook and corner, flourishing around the prostrate effigies of departed warriors, whose monumental busts lay stretched like rigid corses under their ruined canopies.

"The old kirk o' Inchisla just ower again!" exclaimed Evan, as he surveyed the heaps of prostrate pillars and crumbled arches with feelings of awe and veneration.

"Santos! will you be silent?" asked Pedro, in a fierce whisper in Spanish.

"I dinna ken what ye say, mon; ye are waur than an Aberdonian."

"Keep silence, Evan!" said Ronald; "we are close upon their lair now."

A ray of light, streaming through a cross-formed loophole, drew them towards it; and on looking in, they beheld the assembled conclave of the worthies they were in search of, but found them more numerous than Lazaro Gomez had given them to believe. In the crypt, or lower vaults of the chapel, stood upwards of twenty, perhaps thirty, black-browed and swarthy desperadoes, clustered around the marble pedestal of a tomb, upon which were displayed a great quantity of coin, jewellery, and various articles of value, all glittering in the streaming blaze of a huge oil-lamp placed amid them. Most of the fellows were attired in embroidered jackets, adorned with rich military lace torn from the uniforms of the dead, laced hose, and high-crowned sombreros adorned with feathers, or long cloth head-dresses resembling a nightcap. Some, however, were in absolute rags; none appeared to have been shaven for a month at least, and had their ferocious faces covered with masses of black glossy hair,—probably as a disguise, to be removed as occasion required. All carried pistols and poniards in their sashes or waist-belts, and most of them were armed with military carbines, muskets, and accoutrements, French and English, thousands of which were in

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these days to be found on every battle-field, and to be had for the trouble of taking them away. Trunks, portmanteaus, mails, and innumerable articles of plunder lay piled in various corners.

Fastened by strong cords to the pillars which supported the groined roof of the crypt, appeared five or six fierce Spanish mastiff dogs, animals of a reddish colour generally, larger and stronger than British greyhounds. They seemed aware of the approach of strangers: every moment they made the hollow vaults ring with their hoarse yells, while they rolled about their fierce red eyes, and shook the snow-white foam from their jet-black muzzles as they strained and strove, almost strangling themselves in the attempt, to snap the cords which bound them to the stone columns.

"Senor, we must retire, if it please you," whispered Pedro; "it would be worse than Moorish rashness if three of us were to encounter thirty such devils. And then the dogs—"

"I fear we must abandon the attempt," replied the officer, in a voice of stern regret. Discretion is the better part of valour, and Narvaez and I may meet again; but now—"

"It is just a temptin' o' Providence, sir," said Evan, "to bide here, wi' sic a nest o' born deils below us. What an awfu' looking gallows rogue the chield is that counts oot the siller."

The light fell fully upon the robber's face as Evan spoke.

"It is,—it is the very villain who fired at me near Merida," muttered Ronald, almost aloud, in a tone of uncontrollable passion, and feeling scarcely able to restrain himself from shooting Cifuentes dead upon the spot; but he repressed the fierce sentiments of intense hatred, indignation, and horror which he entertained for him, and paused even when his hand was on the lock of the musket which he carried.

"Whelp!" exclaimed one furiously to Narvaez, "think you I will thus tamely submit to be defrauded of my share in this matter? Remember, you are not at your old work of dealing out sour wine at Albuquerque! The rings I took from the image of our Lady at Majorga were alone worth two hundred *duros*."

"*Pesetas*, you mean, Julian Diaz,—*pesetas*; they were copper trash."

"I say *duros*; they were pure and beaten gold, embossed richly. Methinks I should best know: I have prayed at that shrine some hundred times ere—" He paused and grew pale.

"Bethink you, Julian, of my last night's work, and—"

"Bah! The stabbing of an old *abogado*."

"Old? Perdition seize him! he fought fiercely for his ill-gotten gold. I broke the blade of a choice knife on the bones that cover his hard heart. But silence, Diaz, my pet! Though we may eat flesh in Lent, and rifle our Lady of Majorga, we would scorn to cheat each other. Honour among—among—"

"Thieves! End the adage at once, driveller," cried he whom they named Julian Diaz, a wild-looking fellow, with a broken nose and a frightful squint. "Honour," he added impatiently, "sounds strangely indeed in such a rogue's mouth as thine, Narvaez,—the broken keeper of a wine casa."

"Why not?" cried a third. "Every man, from the king and the soldier down to the lowest *abogado*, swears now by his word of honour; and why may not we?"

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"Agreed, agreed. Go on, *diavolo!* go on with the distribution," cried the others impatiently.

"Fiend take these dogs! what do they growl at? Some one surely approaches."

"Impossible," answered Diaz. "Lazarillo is watching the only approach, and all is right; so count on, Narvaez."

"Where was I? Ay—three hundred and ninety-eight, three hundred and ninety-nine, four hundred *reals*," continued Narvaez, counting the money, "are one hundred *pesetas;* now, we are thirty in number, including Lazarillo—"

"But the necklace and rings which I took from the old lawyer's daughter?" interrupted the avaricious Julian.

"San Jago of Compostella wither your accursed tongue!" exclaimed Cifuentes, grasping fiercely the hilt of his poniard; "how often am I to lose count by your interruptions? Allow me to deal to each man his share, and then preach, as of old, until you are weary. When you left your cloister at San Juan, you should have left there your monkish greed with your beads and cowl. One hundred pesetas, then, is—is—twenty duros," &c. &c.; and so on he continued to reckon and count, while his brother desperadoes watched round in silence, with louring looks of eagerness, ferocity, and avarice, their hard-featured countenances appearing like those of demons, as the yellow lustre of the lamp fell on their harsh outlines.

"Let us retire now, while we may do so in safety," whispered Ronald. "But how now, Pedro! what is the matter with you?" he asked, on observing that the face of the Spaniard was pale, fierce, and betrayed symptoms of deep excitement.

"Ah! *senor officiale,*" he replied in a scarcely audible voice, "Julian Diaz, the wretch who was this moment disputing with the master rogue, has done me more wrong than even his life can atone for."

"How—how so? Speak low and quickly."

"Two years ago I was about to be wedded to a girl of Merida, Isobel Zuares,—a fair creature, senor, and of good birth, for her grandfather had been an alcalde. The very evening before our marriage, this fiend Julian Diaz, who was then a monk in the Convento de San Juan, sacrilegiously conceived a passion for her at the confessional, and bore her that night by force to the forest of Albuquerque. *Dios! O Dios!* senor, I never again beheld her,—never again in life at least: poor Isobel!" He paused a moment, and the quivering muscles of his face, which appeared pale as that of a spectre in the moonlight, showed the inward agony of his soul.

"Well, Pedro, and this Diaz—"

"Since that day has been a robber and outlaw: as such he has eluded my search. But now—" He cocked and raised his carbine.

"For Heaven's sake—for our own sakes, beware what you do, Gomez! We must retreat rather than attack. Our lives would pay for our rashness in encountering so many."

"God be wi' us! Would ye be temptin' Providence by firing on sic a nest o' caterans?" said Evan angrily, as he dragged Pedro from the wall towards the gloomy dingle. "Come awa, ye desperate loon. If ye haud your life at a bawbee only, I haud mine dearer than a' the goud in the hill o' Keir; and there lies the ransom o' seven crowned kings."

"*Diavolo!* I will not be restrained," cried the dragoon fiercely, disengaging himself from the grasp of the Highlander. "I will revenge

Isobel Zuares, or die!" He rushed to the loop-hole, and fired at the group of bandits. Julian Diaz, shot through the heart, fell dead among his terrified comrades.

"Follow me, senors! I know every pass and thicket of the wood, and will easily elude their pursuit," exclaimed Pedro, dashing into the bushes, and threading his way at random through the maze of dank thickets and entangled underwood. The two mountaineers, acting on the first impulse of the moment, also sought safety by retiring, and followed Pedro with ease and rapidity through every obstacle, having been accustomed from their boyhood to thread the dense pine forests of the Scottish highlands.

Onward they hurried at random, pressing aside the heavy bushes and branches, getting themselves bruised and torn by sharp brambles and hard stumps; but wounds and contusions were unfelt or unheeded in the excitement of the moment, as they pressed forward regardless of immediate consequences. Ronald was boiling with inward rage and vexation to find himself retiring thus from wretches whom he so heartily hated and despised, and more than once he almost resolved to stand and fight against them to the death; but his discretion overruled his desperate resolution, pointing out that flight and deferring his revenge till another time would be the most prudent course to pursue; but that a future time would ever be, seemed at present very doubtful. Fiercely in pursuit, following their path with scrupulous precision, came the outlaws, eager for plunder and revenge. These savage desperadoes had, however, been distanced by some hundred yards; but their shouts, outcries, and the tread of their feet were distinctly heard, as they pursued with the speed and accuracy of men accustomed to the ground, and to the irregular warfare of guerillas.

Now and then the gloom of the dark wood was illumined by a lurid flash, as a random shot was fired in the direction of the fugitives, who more than once had narrow escapes from being killed or wounded; the latter was to be dreaded, as it would have ensured, perhaps, a death of torture from the poniards of the bandits. A part of the forest was now gained where the trees grew thinner, and the ground was more open; but their path was embarrassed by piled masses of rocks, roots and stumps of decayed trees, entwined bushes, fallen cork-trees, deep gorges and holes, and here and there the stony bed of some bubbling brook. Nevertheless they still kept their pursuers at the same distance, and trod on quickly and in silence.

The moon, which had been obscured for some time, now broke forth and lighted the wild scenery with the pale splendour of its silvery light.

"These wretches are undoubtedly gaining upon us," said Ronald, pausing a moment to listen and draw breath. "Your ill-timed rashness, Pedro, will certainly cost us our lives."

"For my own I care not; but I regret that yours, noble senor, or that of my gallant comrade, should be placed in such deadly peril by me."

"It was a temptin' o' Providence to attack sic a gang," observed Evan, who had begun to comprehend Spanish a little. "O'd, sir! gin we had but ten o' our ain braw fellows here, we would soon gar them ca' a halt."

"Yes; oh! had we but so many of the Gordon Highlanders here, I would soon give these vagabonds fight, thirty of them though there be."

"Twenty-eight, senor; my hand has struck two from the muster-

roll," said Pedro, ducking his head to avoid a shot which whistled past.

"There they are now. How it stings me to the heart's core to fly thus before such a despicable crew!"

As the moon shone forth again, their pursuers were distinctly seen behind, bounding over rocks, and leaping through bushes, clearing every impediment with the activity of roes, while the wild yells, maledictions, and blasphemy, with which they startled the far echoes of the lonely forest, imparted to the scene a singular and exciting, but certainly terrible effect. Some becoming weary, or missing the track, their numbers were now diminished to about a score, and shot upon shot they sent after the three fugitives, the glitter of whose polished appointments they could plainly discern in the moonlight.

"Fire on them! take a cool and deliberate aim, that every shot may take down its man!" cried Ronald, in a voice which had become hoarse with passion and fatigue; while, by way of example, he levelled the musket of the dead robber over a fragment of rock, and let fly its contents at the nearest pursuer, who fell with a shriek that started the wild birds in the farthest recesses of the wood, and gave a temporary check to the ardour of the banditti, who still followed them closely; but more warily—firing at them from behind rocks and bushes, maintaining a running skirmish, which, notwithstanding the danger, had something very exciting in it, and pleased Ronald's bold and fiery disposition better than the unresisting manner of their previous flight.

"Our Lady of Majorga assist us!" cried Pedro in a voice of dismay. "We are lost now, senor: the fiends have brought up the dogs to their assistance."

"Pause not a second, but fire and reload; we have steel and lead for the dogs, as well as for their less noble masters. Excellent! that shot told well, Evan."

"Ay, sir, the fallow is kicking up his shoon like a red-rae. I see his legs in the moonlicht dangling ower the cairn o' stanes," replied the other, coolly trailing his piece, and ramming another charge hard home: "But o'd, sir, look at thee awfu' black tykes, louping ower scaur and bush, bank and brae, like fairies, or sic-like awsome things. Sleuth-dogs, I declare! the born deevils!"

"*Demonios! senors.* I tell you we are lost," said Pedro, in a tone of anger and impatience. "You know not the unmatched ferocity of our Spanish mastiffs. They are yet far off; but should they reach us, all the rotten bones in the *relicario* of San Juan would not save us, if we had them here."

"Take courage, sargento! I place more reliance upon a strong hand and a bold heart, than all the relicarios in Spain: but, certes, these are most devilish antagonists."

Leaping over every intervening obstacle with incredible speed, onward came the six mastiff dogs, yelling and growling as if Pandemonium had broken loose. Clearing rock and bush at a bound, on they came, their glossy skins and starting eyes shining and gleaming in the light, which showed distinctly one that had outstripped its comrades. Its growls were deep and hoarse; the snow-white foam was dropping on the grass and leaves from its red open mouth, as it came careering forward with the fearlessness, ferocity, and determination of some diabolical spirit.

"For this one I will reserve my fire," said Stuart, knowing himself to be a deadly shot; "meanwhile blaze away, and aim steadily, brave hearts!"

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"A minute more, and it will be upon us; one must certainly become its victim," replied Pedro: "that victim must be me, if my poniard fails to despatch it. My rashness brought this about, and I am ready to pay the penalty."

"Pshaw! never despond. Mark that fellow with the red cap."

"He is down, senor," replied the other coolly, as he shot the man dead. "I can die content. I have gained vengeance on Julian Diaz, and I should have been no true Spaniard had I not revenged myself."

"I will hold you but *medio Espanol*, if you talk thus. Courage, good Pedro! I will rid us of this pursuer,—my aim is deadly."

"Could we but escape this one, our safety would be secured. On the other side of this stream is a cavern, the mouth of which is concealed and overgrown with wild vines; but I know it well, as I do every foot of ground hereabout. Let us but gain it, and we can remain there in safety until some assistance arrives. We are now close on the road that leads from La Nava to Albuquerque."

They found themselves on the brink of a rushing torrent, which, hurrying down from the summits of the Sierra de Montanches, swept over its rugged channel towards the Guadiana, seeking the most unfrequented and solitary gorges and defiles to wander through.

"Let us jump into the burn, sir," cried Evan eagerly. "Let us jump in, and gang up the water a wee bit, and the sleuth hounds will sune tyne the scent. My faither, the piper, aye telled that was the only way to get rid o' evil speerits and sic-like, to put a rinnin water between them and yoursel."

"Right, Evan! we are almost safe. Plunge in: follow me!" cried Ronald, springing into the stream, which rose to his waist: the others followed. Keeping close under some weeping willows, that thickly overhung the water, they eluded the search of the ferocious dog, which at that instant gave a yell of disappointment as it shook the foam from its chaps, and stood panting and growling on the bank above them. It next ran fiercely to and fro, snorting and snuffing the air, and tearing up huge pieces of turf with its sharp fangs, as if to discover the lost prey.

"We must cross and gain the cavern now, senor, while the rogues are so far in our rear," said Pedro Gomez, after they had advanced up the bed of the current a little way, treading with difficulty on the slippery pebbles. "I know the path, *senor officiale;* follow me promptly, if you please,—now is the critical time to elude them altogether." Pedro sprang with agility up the steep bank; Ronald followed, but poor Evan, encumbered by his wet tartan kilt, which in the hurry he had neglected to lift in the Highland manner, stumbled in the centre of the rushing torrent, and at the moment he fell backwards the fierce quadruped sprang upon him from the bank above with a wild yell, and seizing him by the thick folds of his filledh-beg, drew him under water. He was so much disconcerted at finding himself grasped by the terrible foe, that he was only able to utter a faint cry when the stream closed over him; but yet he struggled fiercely with his growling antagonist.

"God, he is lost!" exclaimed Ronald, when on looking back he beheld the danger of his faithful follower. Half swimming, he hurried to the spot, with his broad-sword shortened in his hand, and grasping the dog by the throat, plunged the sharp weapon twice through its body. Its teeth relaxed the hold of Evan's tartan, and the quivering carcase floated bleeding down the stream; while the rescued Highlander, propping himself with his musket (which luckily he had never

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relinquished), sprang up the bank, where he shook himself like a water-dog, the wet streaming from his bonnet and every part of his dress.

"*Viva!* noble cavalier; gallantly done! Follow me, this is the cavern," exclaimed Pedro; and rushing up a steep ascent, they followed his example in plunging at once through a thicket of dark green bushes, and found themselves in a gloomy hole, the extent or height of which it was impossible to discover, being involved in utter darkness. The densely thick foliage around the entrance formed a complete exclusion to the light of the moon, which now revealed a dozen or more of their pursuers on the opposite bank of the stream, about which they hunted in every direction for some trace of those they had pursued, and urged on their dogs, which, now completely at fault, ran up and down, scenting among the willow trees and shelving rocks, mingling their hoarse baying with the loud and bitter curses of the banditti.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SIEGE.

"Fore-doomed is every felon Scot,
Who stains our native land.
* * * *
In ambush, near this darksome stream,
Five hundred rifles lay;
The water-kelpie stroaked his beard,
And nichered for his prey."

Daniel Vedder.

"THEY must be somewhere hereabout," cried Cifuentes, with a horrible oath, speaking at intervals, while he panted with exhaustion and fatigue. "But where in the name of Beelzebub can they have concealed themselves?"

"They crossed the stream, I can swear," replied one fellow, while he loaded his musket. "I saw them descend the bank with my own eyes."

"You could scarcely see them well with another man's, Puerco Vadija; but there is no trace of them on the opposite bank. One of the dogs is missing, too."

"There it lies, floating among the rocks and foam yonder," replied a third ruffian.

"Dead?"

"Ay, dead as Judas."

"*Demonios!* How can these cursed fiends have escaped us?"

"Fiends they appear to be, certainly. They were but three in number, and a hundred shots have missed them, while they have slain some of our best men."

"By all the might of hell!" exclaimed Narvaez, in a voice of bitter rage, "they shall not escape us, if we once more gain sight of them. To the gay bravo with the large black feathers I bear a hatred, that every drop of blood in his coward heart only can quench. To think that they should escape us scathless, after having slain so many!"

"Poor Julian Diaz!" said Vadija. "A more jolly monk was not in Estremadura, where there are well nigh six thousand of the cord and cowl."

"*Dios!* it maddens me!"

"And then the brave Lazarillo de Xeres de los Cavalleros—"

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"How, Vadija! what of him?"

"I found him lying dead in the pathway, stabbed twice in the heart."

"*Hombres!* Close round me, comrades; we must fall on some plan to seek vengeance. It is evident they have not crossed the stream,—we must have seen them had they done so; therefore they must be close at hand, and—" The rest was lost in the clamour of the others, who clustered round Cifuentes, each delivering his opinion, and holding forth obstinately against those of his brother rogues, many more of whom were coming straggling up from the rear, panting and almost breathless with exertion. Meanwhile the three fugitives had thrown themselves, wet as they were, upon the damp floor of the cavern, happy to find rest and time to breathe with some regularity and composure.

From behind their screen of thick foliage Ronald heard all that passed, and watched with increasing interest the picturesque appearance of the bandits, whom he could plainly discern in the radiant moonlight, that shed its clear cold lustre through the dark blue vault, where myriads of stars were twinkling. Meanwhile Iverach, who had quite recovered from the dismay caused by his recent immersion, was busily employed drying his wetted musket, and preparing for action by fixing a new flint and reloading, rejoicing to find that his thick leather pouch had kept his ball cartridges perfectly dry.

"Thanks to Santa Maria, we are safe, senors," said Pedro; "they can never discover this cavern, which is so admirably adapted for concealment. It was in ancient days the retreat of a holy hermit, who was drowned one dark night in the river below,—but that came of eating flesh upon a Friday, they say."

"I wish we had gone to Majorga with your brother Lazaro; this cursed adventure would then have been avoided. This hole is very damp, and cold as the grave."

"But then it is so secure, senor; and we can defend it to the last, and sell our lives dearly, should they attack us." Before Ronald could reply,

"Bah! Lope Ordonez," cried Narvaez, "how should they know of this concealed cavern which you say is up yonder? Are they not British? and two of them belong to those savages that go with their limbs bare."

"The same guide that led them to the ruins of Santa Lucia, might show them the cavern."

"Right, Ordonez. I thought not that there was so much wit in that empty calabash of thine."

"They have a Spaniard with them," said he whom they named Vadija; "I saw the moon reflected on his steel helmet."

"A dragoon! Had he a plume of red horse-hair?"

"He had; but I think he has left the half or whole of it among the bushes in his flight."

"*Caramba!* then 'tis either Don Alvaro, or one of his rascally troop! I shall have revenge for the night they made me spend in the Convento de San Juan at Merida. We will search this cavern, and take a true Spanish vengeance on whoever we find there. Look well to your knives and flints, comrades."

"I perceive," said Ordonez, "some alteration has taken place among the vines which conceal the entrance. They are all broken and trodden down; I can swear they were not so this morning."

"Then there it is they are concealed. Tie up the dogs! bind them

to the trees; cross the stream. Let whoever thirsts for vengeance, follow me! let whoever is concealed there *tremble*, for their hour is come!" said Narvaez, concluding with one of those frightful Spanish maledictions with which their conversation was so freely interspersed. The reader may suppose with what feelings of excitement and desperation the three weary fugitives beheld their remorseless pursuers boldly cross the stream to storm their hiding-place. But perhaps Cifuentes and his followers would have advanced less courageously, had they been perfectly assured that those of whom they were in search were really so close at hand.

"Thank Heaven, and our own caution, the ammunition is dry," said Ronald; "and the sixty rounds we have among us will last until to-morrow, if we are sparing and aim well. Let us fire on them as they cross the stream; 'tis neck or nothing with us now. See that you make sure of your man. I will aim at Cifuentes—the scoundrel with the long feather and high-crowned hat."

The three muskets at once flashed from the dark cavern, the distant echoes of which echoed to the loud report, while the sudden light filled its windings and craggy nooks, illuminating them for an instant as a flash of lightning would have done. Three of the banditti fell splashing in the middle of the stream, which bore them off from the rush of their comrades, whom this unlooked-for volley had stricken with dismay. Ronald missed Narvaez, owing to a sudden motion of the latter; but severely wounded Punco Vadija, who was behind him. Evan and Pedro had both killed their men.

The wild shrieks and outcries of the drowning robber, re-echoing among the windings of the stream, so greatly appalled and terrified his brother rogues, that, instead of advancing to the assault, they re-crossed the stream, fled up the bank, and ensconced themselves behind the rocks and trees, seeking shelter from the deadly aim of their concealed enemies, and abandoning Vadija to his fate; but his last drowning cry, as it came sweeping towards them on the night-wind, found an echo in the heart of his slayer. From behind the covers where they had posted themselves, a sharp fire was maintained on both sides for some hours, without any damage being done. However, the three soldados had the best of it in this bush-fighting sort of warfare, as they could aim steadily at a head, or a leg, or an arm, the moment it appeared in view, without exposing themselves in the slightest degree; while their opponents took for their object of attack the large dark cluster of vines which concealed the cavern's mouth, and leaden bullets innumerable came whistling through the intertwined foliage, and were flattened against the rocks, or sunk with a loud bang into the soft green turf near its entrance. But Ronald and his friends escaped most miraculously, while the shot hissed often within an inch of their ears, causing a peculiarly unpleasant and tingling sensation within them, which must be experienced to be comprehended properly.

"*Dios mio*, senors; my cartridges are nearly expended. I have but six left," cried the dragoon, shaking the little cartridge-box which hung at his shoulder-belt.

"Heavens! I have fired my last shot," exclaimed Stuart, in reply, when, on putting his hand into Lazarillo's canvass pouch, he found it empty. "We can never hold out till some relief comes. Evan, how stands your pouch?"

"Four charges, sir; deil a ane mair. We maun defend this hole by the could airn when a' are gane."

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"Stay—cease firing. Reserve the ten rounds, to be used only in case of some pressing extremity," said Ronald, first in English, and then in Spanish.

"Exactly, senor; ten rounds are the lives of ten men. Should the ladrones advance again, we will not fire until we are well assured our fire will prove effective."

"They are more numerous now than before," observed the officer, pushing aside the vines to view their foes. "There are a dozen more high-crowned sombreros among them; I see them plainly above the rocks."

"*Santos!* O senor, allow me to fire?" asked Pedro, slapping impatiently the butt of his carbine. "See yonder fellow behind the chestnut; his whole body is visible. Do allow me, noble senor? 'tis a fair chance."

"Hold, my fiery sargento; we must be sparing of what is left us—The devil! Draw back, man, or you will certainly be shot."

At that moment six muskets flashed from concealed places, and some of the balls grazed the cone of Pedro's steel helmet, which the waning light of the moon had revealed to them.

It soon became apparent to the bandits that the ammunition of their antagonists was expended, and their courage and insolence rose accordingly. They showed their whole figures at times, and fired with greater rapidity than before, shouting,—

"*Mueran los heregos! Muera, borrachos! perros! ladrones!*" and many a loud and deep *carajo*, together with innumerable other Spanish epithets and maledictions.

"Thank Heaven, day begins to break," observed Pedro Gomez, as a pale light in the east began to replace that of the faded moon.

"We shall then get rid of these bawling rascals; they will scarcely dare to besiege us in open daylight."

"I have my doubts as to what course they may pursue, senor."

"How, Pedro?"

"Indeed, senor, in the present disorganized state of the country, our Spanish robbers are bold enough to do anything. Throughout the whole land they are numerous as the leaves of the forest, and keep up lines of regular communication between one place and another. We may thank the French invasion for such a state of things."

"Why are such bands permitted to exist?"

"Exist, senor! Can shaven monks or lazy alcaldes subdue them?"

"No; but armed soldiers may."

"Lord Wellington does not meddle with them, as they never assault his troops; and old Murillo's soldiers have always work enough on hand without making war on the banditti."

"But how do these fellows come to be so numerous? Ah, curse that ball! a narrow escape."

"Senor, war compels our peasantry to become fierce and roving guerillas: from the guerilla to the bandit is an easy transition."

"I may rejoice that at home, in my own country, we have nothing of that kind to experience. 'Tis perfect daylight now: the thieves are still on the watch. I would they had retired, as I feel very much exhausted by fatigue and want of sleep."

The two soldiers felt in the same predicament, and the reader may imagine the comfort of being drenched by fording the deep stream, and then being obliged to pass the night in a damp cavern without sleep or rest, after the stirring events, exhaustion, and fatigue of the day, and

the exposure to the bullets of some twenty desperadoes for an entire night. Evan was seized with a cold shivering, like a fit of the ague, and began to drop asleep in spite of his strenuous efforts to keep himself awake.

Pedro produced his crucifix, and began to mutter his morning orisons, mingling with them sundry invectives against ladrones, and wishes for a cup of aquardiente to stimulate him to fresh exertion. The fire of the besiegers had now ceased, and they contented themselves with watching the spot as they sat among the rocks smoking paper cigars, and fixing new flints to their pieces; while coarse jokes were mingled with the growls and curses of three or four that lay bleeding under the shelter of a large block of granite rock, but untended and uncared for by their comrades, who had half stripped three others of their dead, now tossed under the willow trees to be out of view,—the features of the slain being too unpleasant an object for them to contemplate.

"The sun has risen," said Ronald, as its bright beams darted through openings in the vines. "I will reconnoitre round about, and perhaps I may discover some signs of our troops, if I can see the road which leads to Merida." He received no answer. The mumble-jumble of Pedro's paternoster, and a prolonged snore from Iverach, informed him that his companions in peril were not inclined for conversation. Laying aside his bonnet, he crept close to the mouth of the cave, and putting back the foliage softly, cast a careful and keen glance around him. Their besiegers on the opposite bank of the stream were still stationed as I have described them, and appeared evidently determined to revenge the fall of their comrades by starving their slayers into a capitulation. Behind them, and to the right rose the umbrageous foliage of the cork-wood, intermingled with lofty chesnuts, stretching away in long vistas until lost in gloom and obscurity. On the left the trees were more scattered, and between the trunks he beheld the wide plain extending away in the direction of Merida, its broad and level extent bounded by a blue undulating ridge of far-off mountains, the line of which lay low down in the distance, and formed the boundary of the horizon. The warm lustre of the morning sun was shed joyously on the wide expanse, calling into life a thousand birds and insects, and causing the wild flowers to raise their dewy heads, and shake the moisture from their opening petals.

But throughout all the wide prospect which the lofty situation of their retreat enabled him to command, not one human being appeared —no succour was in sight. O how he longed to behold the glitter of arms, the flash of burnished steel, through the dusty cloud which announces afar off the march of armed men! And his heart beat with redoubled velocity while he gazed upon the band of contemptible yet dreaded ruffians, whom they had kept at bay the live-long night.

The report of a musket, the whiz and crack of a ball, as it was flattened against the hard granite walls of the cavern, made him suddenly withdraw his head; and the loud shout of savage derision and laughter which arose from those below caused his blood to boil tumultuously, and his heart to swell with anger and impatience. He soon found himself becoming a prey to weariness and exhaustion, owing to the fatigue, excitement, and want of sleep which he had endured during the last twenty-four hours, and it was with the utmost difficulty he refrained from following Evan's example, and falling into slumber. Often did Pedro Gomez recommend him earnestly to do so, reminding him how

much might yet have to be endured, and promising to keep faithful watch and ward; but Ronald dared not trust him, fearing that he too might be overcome with drowsiness, and leave them at the mercy of the bandits. Towards noon, to their inexpressible satisfaction, the besiegers began to draw off by degrees, as if wearied of the affair, and retired into the wood, leaving the ford of the river free.

"*Hio!* our Lady del Pilar!" cried Pedro, exultingly. "*Viva!* senor; they have abandoned their post. Should we get off scathless, I vow most solemnly to visit the shrine of our Lady of Majorga, and present her with three days' pay, and a new hat of the best kind that Badajoz or Zafra can produce."*

"And should we not get off scathless, Pedro?" said Ronald merrily, as he rose from the ground and stretched his limbs.

"Then not a maravedi shall she get from Sargento Gomez,—no, *diavolo!*"

Ronald laughed aloud at the Spaniard's ideas of religious gratitude, and aroused his servant, who started up with agility, grasping his musket, all alive in an instant to the recollection of their situation.

"Gracious me, sir! I daur say I have slept. On sic an occasion as this to tempt Providence wi'—"

"Never mind, Evan, my honest man; all is right now."

"But the reiving loons—"

"Have abandoned their post and fled. We have nothing to do now but to march off, and make the best of our way to some safe place. Had we accepted the offer of the honest muleteer, we should have escaped a most disagreeable night; but as the play says, 'All is well that ends well.'"

"But dinna be ower rash, sir," said Evan cautiously, as he looked through the screen of vines, and surveyed the ground with a sharp glance. "Be weel assured that the caterans are gane for guide and a'," he added, grasping his master's belt as he was about to descend.

"Gone? I tell you they are so undoubtedly," replied Ronald, testily. "You see there is no trace of them now, and we had better depart from our uncomfortable billet without further delay."

"I beg your pardon, sir; but just bide a wee—bide a wee. What ca' ye that?"

While he spoke, the head of a man rose slowly above one of the masses of granite overhanging the forest river, evidently watching their place of concealment. The instant it appeared, Evan levelled and fired his musket, and the black scowling visage of Narvaez Cifuentes withdrew immediately."

"The scoundrels are only in ambush," said Ronald, in a fierce tone of disappointment. "They are watching us still!"

"I do not believe, senor," replied Pedro, "that they would dare to hem us in thus, if the French were not in Merida. The corregidor and alguazils of the city would have been upon them long ere this time."

"I do not think so. Few pass this deserted place; and unless some of our troops, when crossing the plain, are attracted towards us by the sound of our arms, we have no other chance of friendly succour."

"And if not, senor?"

"Then nothing is left us but to make one bold dash for our liberty, or sell our lives as dearly as possible. Their design is evidently to starve us out, the revengeful dogs!"

* Great manufactories of hats are carried on in these towns.

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"The whole band are rising from their cover. Santos! had we left this cavern, what a fate would have been ours! *Cuidado, senor! Carajo!* keep back."

Scarcely had Pedro spoken, when the report of twenty muskets awoke the echoes of the place, and enveloped the bank, the stream, and the wood, in white volumes of curling smoke; and many of the shot whistled into the cave, but luckily fell on the rocks, against which they were flattened as broad as crown-pieces, leaving, wherever they struck, a white round star marked upon the stone. Shot after shot was fired at the place, but without better success. A sort of natural breast-work of turf, running across the mouth of the den, completely shielded the three fugitives from the dangerous and well-directed fire of the outlaws, who continued this system of distant warfare for several hours, until towards evening they again ceased entirely, but continued to watch, although they did not dare to come to closer combat with their opponents, the deadly accuracy of whose aim was a sufficient cause to deter them from attempting to carry the cavern by storm.

"The rogues are indeed very determined, senor," said Pedro. "I hope we shall not have to spend another night in this dismal place, cowering and shivering like rats concealed in a drain."

"I trust not; but when it grows darker, we must make one desperate attempt to cut a way through them, or perish. I trust to a running fight for setting us free of them."

"Our Lady of Succour! would that the hour was come! The holy father that dwelt here must have liked a damp couch better than I do, *demonio!*"

"Doubtless he cheered himself with many a long horn of aquardiente, if they had it in those days."

"Ay, senor, and the place was often enlivened by the presence of the peasant girls of La Nava, who came hither for confession. They are droll dogs, these solitary monks. Many a strange story is current of the white-bearded Padre of San Bartolomi."

"What he who shows the sulphurous spring of Alange?"

"Ay; he is as arrant a knave as we have on this side the pass of Roncesvalles. But the sun is setting now, senor caballero: I see the trees are casting long shadows across the plain towards the eastward."

"Hand ye awee, Pedro. As sure as I live, I hear—I hear the skirlin o' a bag-pipe."

"A pipe, Evan?" exclaimed Stuart, "a pipe? I trust it is not imagination! By all that's sacred I hear it too!" he added, stooping his ear anxiously to listen. "'Tis playing—what is the air?"

"The 'Haughs o' Cromdale.' O, sir! I ken it weel," replied the Highlander in a thick voice, while his eyes began to glisten.

"*Senor officiale,*" said Pedro, who had been reconnoitring through the vine-bushes, "there are British troops moving on the plain,—red uniforms at least."

"Highlanders! Highlanders!" replied Ronald exultingly, as he beheld a long way off a party of kilted soldiers marching across the dusty plain. The setting sun was shining on the polished barrels of their sloped arms, which flashed and gleamed between the trunks of the trees at every step; even the ribbons fluttering from the drones on the piper's shoulders could be discerned, and the heart-stirring strain he was blowing came floating towards them on the fitful wind.

"What troops are these? and where can they have come from? They march towards Merida, and the French are there."

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"What regiment they belang to, sir, I dinna care: let that flea stick to the wa'. But they are some o' oor ain folk, that's certain. I see the braw feathered bonnet, the filledh-beg, and the gartered hose. O Maister Stuart! can we no fa' on some plan to win their attention? They are fast leaving us behind; and it's an awfu' thocht to be here, hunted in a hole like a yirded tod lowrie, and yet to see the tartan waving in the sun, and hear the wild skirl of the piob mhor. O'd, sir! my birse is getting up; I feel myself turning wild."

"Stay, Evan. Unless you want a bullet to make a button-hole in your skin, keep back! A man on horseback has met them;—they have halted."

"'Tis a pity the knaves cannot see them, senor. By the elevation of this place, we command a farther view than the post which these rascals occupy by the river-side."

"They must have heard the sound of the pipe to which they marched."

"I do not think so; they would have fled had they heard it. Sound is said to ascend, senor."

"True—"

"O'd sir," interrupted Evan, who continued to look through the vines, in spite of one or two shots which were fired at him, "I would fain ken if thae chields are Gordon Highlanders or no. I think they belang to the auld forty-twa: they have some red feathers in their bonnets."

"Red feathers? Not one; they are all black and white: I see them distinctly; but whether they are the Ross-shire Buffs or any of ours, I know not. They are certainly not 42nd men; their long feathers are all white."

"The gloaming's sae mirk and sae far advanced, that I canna see very weel; and my een are sair wi' being in the gloom o' this dismal den sae lang."

"They are British troops; to what corps they belong we need not care, as all are friends alike. They have piled their arms. Surely they mean to bivouac there for the night. I pray to Heaven they may!"

"O sir! let us do something to let them ken o' their friends that are here in tribulation and jeopardy. Fire twa or three shots, just to draw them towards us."

"Not one. We have but nine rounds left,—three each; and as our lives depend upon them, they must be reserved for a grand attempt as soon as it is dark. Besides, from the way the wind blows, they would never hear the reports at such a distance. The clouds are fast gathering, and I see with pleasure we shall have a very black night. We shall certainly escape them, if we are courageous and discreet. What think you, Pedro Gomez?" he asked in Spanish.

"Of course, senor caballero. And as you will scarcely know the way after it is dark, if I have the honour to be again your guide, I will get you off securely. Should I be shot—a fate which our Lady of Succour avert!—you will find an easy ford some hundred yards down the stream. You may cross it fearlessly, and gain safely the place where our friends are bivouacked so quietly on the plain."

"We shall scarcely find the spot in the dark, even with your aid, Pedro. What marks the ford?"

"A stone cross, erected by the monks of San Juan to guide travellers. During a storm, one of the brotherhood perished when crossing the

stream just below us here, and they marked the shallow part by a stone, to avoid such accidents in future."

"But think o' the sleuth-hounds, Maister Ronald," said Evan, who had been listening attentively to Pedro, and endeavouring to comprehend his Spanish. "I scunner at the very thocht of them, after the douking that ane gied me in the burn below."

"We must take our chance of these infernals. But be cool and firm: the time is coming when we must have all our wits about us."

Their conversation had often been interrupted by a stray bullet from the besiegers, who lounged lazily on the opposite bank, smoking their cigars, tearing hard American *bacallao* with their teeth, and sucking the purple wine from a huge pig-skin, which they had pierced in several places with their knives, allowing it to stream on the green sward with a heedless prodigality, which showed how easily it had been come by. This employment they varied by venting curses at each other, and at their obstinate opponents, at whom they now and then sent a random shot; and on one occasion a complete volley at Evan's bonnet, which, by way of bravado, he had elevated to their view on the point of his bayonet. A storm of balls whistled about it, and the young Gael laughed heartily at the joke.

"Your bonnet is riddled," said Ronald, on seeing the feathers, nearly all shot away.

"Deil may care, sir! the king has mair bonnets than this ane; and there's plenty ostrich feathers whar thae cam frae," replied he, hoisting it again through the vines; but the Spaniards did not waste their ammunition upon it a second time.

The bivouac of their comrades, which they watched with untiring eyes, and other distant objects, faded gradually from their view as the increasing darkness of night deepened around them. The sky grew black, as masses of dense and heavy clouds drifted slowly across it; and the cold Spanish dews began to descend noiselessly (yet heavy and wetting as a shower of rain) on the grass and leaves, which, as the wind died away, hung motionless and still; and, save the muttering voices of the outlaws, not a sound broke the stillness of the lonely place but the hoarse brawl of the mountain-torrent as it rushed over its stony bed, from which the white foam glimmered through the darkness. Now and then, afar off, a red streak shot through the parted clouds, or a broad lurid flash of sheet-lightning lit the edge of the horizon, showing distinctly the curved outline of the distant hills, and the tall black trunks of the neighbouring trees; but no sound of thunder followed these appearances.

"Senor," whispered Pedro, "the night is perfectly dark,—just such as one would wish for on such an occasion."

"Then now is our time to sally," was Ronald's reply, as he grasped his musket, and slung his claymore on the brass hook of his shoulder-belt, that it might not impede him. "Now or never; follow me!"

He pushed softly aside the foliage, and issued from the cavern. They were enabled to see objects with greater distinctness, owing to the pitchy darkness they had endured in their retreat, where it was so dense that one could not discern the face of the other. Enabled thus to see his way with greater accuracy, Ronald descended the bank of the river in the direction of the stone cross. The others followed with hasty and stealthy footsteps, and in a few minutes they gained the rude column which marked the ford.

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"We are safe, senor caballero!" exclaimed Pedro, when they stood on the opposite side. "Our Lady of Majorga shall get the three days' pay, a hat of the best Zafra felt, and a pound of wax candles to boot."

"You are liberal to her ladyship. When are your presents to be given?"

"The first time I pass her shrine," laughed the other, "which may not be during the term of my natural life."

"Yonder is the bivouac," said Ronald, as they scrambled hurriedly up the embankment; "they have lit a fire. How very close upon us it appears."

"The plain is so level, that distance deceives; but they are fully a quarter of a mile from us yet."

"Hurrah!" cried Evan, overjoyed to find himself safe. "Tak' that, ye ill-faured loons!" firing his musket in the direction of their foes.

"Fool!" exclaimed Ronald angrily; "how have you dared to fire without my desiring you?"

Evan's deprecating reply was cut short by a shout from their baffled enemies, who, firing their pieces at random, rushed hurriedly towards the ford, mingling their outcries with the yells of their dogs. But the unexpected appearance of the large watch-fire blazing on the plain, and the dusky forms of the soldiery crowding around it, served completely to check their pursuit; and with many a hoarse malediction and threat, after firing a volley in the direction where they supposed the fugitives to be, they retired with precipitation into the fastnesses of the cork-wood.

"What a cursed adventure we have had!" exclaimed the officer, throwing away the pouch and musket of Lazarillo de Zeres de los Cavalleros, when they halted to draw breath for a few seconds. "Evan Iverach, you are a rash fellow; by firing that useless shot, we might all have lost our lives. It may also have alarmed the troops yonder, and caused them to get under arms."

"O'd, sir, never mind; there's nae folk like our ain folk," replied his follower, capering gaily when the figures of their countrymen, clad in the martial Scottish garb, became more distinct. "O how my heart loups at sight o' the belted plaid, the braw filledh-beg, and the bare legs o' our ain douce chields."

"Wha gangs there?" shouted close by the voice of an advanced sentry, the black outline of whose bonnet and gray great-coat they saw looming through the gloom. "Wha gangs there?"

"Friend," replied Ronald.

"Friends, friends,—hurrah!" cried his follower, rushing upon the astonished sentry, and grasping him by the hand.

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CHAPTER XVII.

A MEETING.

"Our fathers contended in war; but we meet together at the feast. Our swords are turned on the foe of our land: he melts before us on the field. Let the days of our fathers be forgot, hero of Mossy Strumon."—*Ossian.*

AROUND the ample fire, on which a succession of billets and crackling branches were continually heaped, were grouped some seventy or eighty soldiers—Gordon Highlanders, as was evident from their yellow facings and the stripes of their tartan. The fairness of their complexions, and the bright colour of their untarnished uniform, served likewise to show that they had but recently arrived from Great Britain. Some lay fast asleep between the piles or bells of arms, while others crowded round the fire, conversing in that low voice, and behaving in that restrained manner, which the presence of an officer always imposes on British soldiers.

The officer himself sat close by the watch-fire, which shone brightly on his new epaulets and other gay appointments. His plumed bonnet lay beside him on the turf, and his fair curly hair glistened in the flame, which revealed the handsome and delicate but rosy features of a very young man—one, perhaps, not much above seventeen years of age. He was laughing and conversing with the soldiers near him, in that easy manner which at once shows the frankness of the gentleman and soldier, and which is duly appreciated by those in the ranks, although it tends in no way to lessen the respect due to the epaulet. A black pig-skin lay near him, from which he was regaling himself, allowing also some of the soldiers to squeeze the liquor into their wooden canteens.

On Ronald Stuart's approach, the sudden apparition of an officer in the uniform of their own regiment, coming they knew not whence, created no small surprise in the little bivouac; and the sudden murmur and commotion which arose among them, caused the young officer to turn his head and look around him.

"Ronald—Ronald Stuart!" he exclaimed, in well-known accents, as he sprang lightly from the green turf, his eyes sparkling with surprise and joy; "how have you come so unexpectedly upon us?"

"Ah, Louis, my old friend! and you have really joined us, to follow the pipe and the drum?" replied Stuart, grasping his hand, and longing to embrace him as he would have done a brother; but the presence of so many restrained him, and he contented himself with gazing fondly on the face of his early friend, and tracing in his fine features the resemblance he bore to his sister. The expression was the same, but the eyes and hair of Alice Lisle were dark; the eyes of Louis were light blue, and his hair was fair—of that soft tint between yellow and auburn. His features, of course, possessed not that exquisite feminine delicacy which appeared in the fair face of Alice, but yet the family likeness was striking, and pleasing for Ronald Stuart to contemplate and recognise.

"He has her very accent and voice," thought he. "Well, Louis! and how are all at home among the mountains? Does old Benmore keep his head in the mist, as usual?"

"All were well when I left in January last; and I dare say the red

deer and muirfowl keep jubilee in our absence, for sad havoc we used to make among them."

The soldiers, to allow them the freedom of conversation, respectfully fell back, and clustered round Evan Iverach, who, after he had paid his rustic compliments "to his auld friend Maister Lisle, frae the Inch-house," began to regale his gaping countrymen with an exaggerated narrative of his late adventures in Spain; and many a "Hoigh! Oich! Eigh!" and other Scottish interjections of wonder, he called forth as he proceeded.

After a hearty draught from the borachio-skin, many were the questions asked and answers given about home and absent friends; and Ronald's account of his rencontres and adventures with Cifuentes, certainly did not impress Louis Lisle with a very high opinion of the state of society and civilization generally in Spain.

"This must be a strange country," observed he, "when fellows can rove about plundering and rieving, as Rob Roy and the Serjeant Mhor used to do in our grandfathers' days. And the villains from whom you have suffered so much are still lurking in that dark forest of cork-trees?"

"Yes; their fastness is in the heart of it. If the rules of the service sanctioned such a proceeding, I would with this party of ours surround the wood, hunt out the rascals from their lair, and put every one of them to death."

"But Lord Wellington—"

"Would make it a general court-martial affair. But there is a time for everything, and this Spanish robber and I may meet again."

"Spain appears a wretched country to campaign in."

"Truly it is so."

"I liked Lisbon pretty well; and found much amusement in frequenting the assembly-room, the Italian opera-house, the theatre, and circus for the bull-fights."

"Faith! I saw none of these things, Louis; my purse is scarcely so deep as yours. And the public promenades, you visited them, doubtless?"

"The trees and shrubbery are beautifully arranged; but I cannot admire the ladies of Lisbon, they are so little, so meagre and tawny."

"You will like Spain better. Hand me the pig-skin, if you please."

"I have not been very favourably impressed by what I have seen of it. The roads on our route are all but impassable,—mere sheep-tracks in some places; and the posadas are the most wretched to be imagined."

"Rather different from the snug 'Old George' at Perth, with its portly landlord, bowing waiters, and smiling hostess."

"Rather so; and tiresome indeed I found the march thus far,—the towns in ruins, and between them immense desert tracks, where neither a house, a human being, nor a vestige of cultivation was to be seen."

"But it was a useless order to march your detachment thus far to the westward, when the division is retreating. You could have joined at Portalagre."

"I am aware of it; but to march and join the regiment without delay were the orders given me by the commandant at Portalagre. By my route, this day's march should have ended at Merida; but a muleteer, to my no small surprise, informed us of its being in possession of

the French; and having no one to consult, I felt at a loss how to act, and halted here."

"'Twas rash of the surly old commandant to send so young and inexperienced an officer in charge of a detachment through a foreign country; but those fellows on the staff, who skulk in the rear, have never the true interest of the service at heart."

"And Sir Rowland Hill is retiring on the Portuguese frontier?"

"*En route*, I believe, for Ciudad Rodrigo, where Lord Wellington means to give battle to Marmont. The troops are marching from all points to join him, and we may soon have the glory of being actors in a general engagement."

"Well; and this place Merida—"

"Is possessed by three or four troops of French lancers: I saw them enter last night. You have acted most prudently in halting here, as a skirmish with so numerous a party was well avoided. But we shall probably have the pleasure of seeing them prisoners of war, when our people come up in the course of to-morrow. I shall make a tour round the sentries in a few minutes, and see that they are on the alert, and then retire to roost under that laurel-bush: I feel quite worn out with my last night's affair."

"You must act for yourself now, Stuart. Should anything occur, you of course take command of the party," replied Louis drily, and in a tone totally different from that of his late observations.

"Ay, Louis; I am a senior sub, you know," said Ronald, colouring at the other's tone.

"What sort of man is Cameron of Fassifern?" asked Louis abruptly, after a long pause.

"A true soldier every inch; and a prouder Highlander never drew a sword."

"Fierce and haughty, is he not?"

"Yes, but a perfect gentleman withal. You will find the most of ours very fine fellows—young men of birth and blood, fire and animation; and you will be charmed with the appearance of the regiment. 'Tis indeed a splendid corps."

Another long and perplexing pause ensued, while an expression of doubt and perturbation began to cloud the faces of both. Need I say that Alice—Alice Lisle, of whom neither had yet spoken, was the cause? Although until now he had disguised it, Lisle's indignation was bitterly aroused to find that Ronald conversed on a variety of topics with an air of lightness, and asked a thousand questions about friends at home in Perthshire, yet that never once had the name of Alice passed his lips. His pride was roused, and consequently he determined not to be the first to speak of his sister, and the anger which was swelling in his heart caused him to assume a distant and haughty behaviour towards his friend, who considered it but a confirmation of the report which he had seen in the *Edinburgh Journal;* and *his* mountain pride and indignant feelings were likewise roused, making him, in turn, display a cold distance of manner to one whom he had ever regarded as his earliest and dearest, almost only friend and companion—as his very brother.

And this was the happy meeting to which both had so ardently looked forward as a source of pleasure for some time past!

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"Truly," thought Ronald, "my father's old-fashioned prejudices

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were not without a cause; these Lisles of Inchavon are not entwined with either the sentiments of affection or honour."

"Poor Alice!" thought Lisle, at the same moment; "how have her fond and misplaced affections been trifled with! Scarcely has this heartless Highlander (full of his mountain pride and bombast) parted with her, before she is forgotten as utterly as if she did not exist."

However, they kept these thoughts to themselves, and continued to amuse their minds into a state of hot indignation against each other, indignation mingled with feelings of disappointment and sorrow, especially on the part of Louis Lisle.

He had produced from his havresack the remains of his last day's rations—a few hard biscuits and some cold meat, on which Ronald, although he had fasted so long, merely made a show of regaling himself: he felt little inclination to eat, but often applied himself to the wine-skin. After a long and confusing sort of pause, during which both had severely taxed their imaginations for somewhat to converse about;

"I have heard," observed Ronald, "that your father is again suing for the long dormant peerage, the title of Lord Lysle."

"Yes, it is the case. How heard you of it?"

"By a letter from Lochisla. I drink to Sir Allan's health! I have not seen him since the day I pulled him out of the deep linn at Corrie-avon. I wish him every chance of success!"

"There is little doubt but we shall carry our point during this session of Parliament: my father's descent in a direct line from the last lord is now clear beyond a doubt or quibble. He is certain to gain the day."

"I am sure I shall be most happy——"

"The Earl of Hyndford," continued Louis, in the same cold manner, "is my father's most particular friend, and has some interest with the law lords. He is on the ministerial side, and—— But what is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing. Is there any more wine in the skin? I feel very faint after my late fatigue, surely," muttered Stuart, making a tremendous mental effort to appear calm. But the name of Hyndford had caused his heart to leap as it were to his very lips, which quivered as a nervous spasm twitched them, while his forehead grew livid and pale.

"Ronald, what on earth is the matter?" asked Louis, kindly, perceiving the changes of his countenance. "Are you turning faint, or ill?"

"Ill,—sick at heart," replied Stuart, scarcely knowing what he said, while he eagerly longed to ask a question—a single question, which he dreaded to hear answered; but the fierce native pride of his race came to his aid, and the inclination was repressed.

"For what shall I condescend to mention her name?" thought he. "To ask in a trembling tone after one who has forsaken me thus, becomes me not. Faithless Alice! neither farewell word, token, or letter has she sent me; but—but I will be calm!" and he placed his hand upon the little miniature, which at that moment he imagined was pressing like a load upon his heart.

"Good Heaven, Stuart! you are certainly very unwell," said Louis, anxiously, his indignant feelings giving way to concern. "What can I do for you?"

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"Oh! 'tis nothing. It is past—a spasm—the wound I received at Merida."

"Are you still troubled by it?"

"No; that is—I mean—"

He was relieved from his embarrassment by an exclamation of surprise and intense disgust from Lisle, who suddenly leaped up from the green turf on which they were seated.

"It is a skull!" he exclaimed, turning something round and white out of the sod with his foot.

"A skull?"

"Yes; I knew not what it was. I felt something round and smooth lying half sunk in the earth, and my hand rested on it for some time. How does it come to lie here?"

"No uncommon affair in Spain. It is the head of one of those poor fellows I told you of. I saw him killed here the day Long's brigade of horse drove the French advanced picquet into the cork-wood.'

"What! did you not bury them?"

"No; we had no time. The wolves came at night and saved us the trouble."

"And this is dying in the bed of glory!"

"So romancers tell us."

"Ay, Stuart, 'tis all very fine to read of honour and glory. The charge, the encounter, and the victory, in a novel—"

"When seated in a well-curtained and softly-carpeted room, with your feet encased in morocco slippers, and a huge fire roaring up the chimney; but here it is a very different matter."

"Nevertheless, 'tis a gay thing to be a soldier," said Louis, eyeing his shining epaulet askance.

"It is, indeed! I have felt some delicious moments of gratified pride since I first donned the red coat,—moments in which I would scarcely have exchanged my claymore for a crown. But this ghastly death's head had better be removed. Probably the poor boy it belonged to, for he was scarcely anything else, had his own bright dreams of glory and military renown, and left his sunny vineyards with hopes that one day he should exchange the goat-skin *pack* for the baton of a marshal of France. If he had such visions, where are they all now? But let it be taken away. Evan, dig a hole with your bayonet, and bury it deep under the turf."

This temporary excitement over, the two friends again relapsed into their dry and unfriendly distance of manner.

"Give me another cup from the horschio skin; I will drink to Sir Allan's health before I compose myself to rest for the night," said Ronald, anxious to put an end to it by retiring.

"Drink and replenish again,—you are most welcome; but you will excuse me, Stuart, if I reply somewhat coldly to your many expressions of regard for my family," replied Louis, assuming a haughtiness of manner which it was impossible to pass over.

"How so? What mean you?" asked Ronald hurriedly, his blood mounting to his very temples while he tossed the wine-horn from him.

"To me it appears very singular," began the other in a determined tone, "indeed most unaccountable, that you have never yet inquired for or mentioned one, whom I had every reason, until to-night, to believe to be very dear to you, and ever uppermost in your thoughts."

"You mean," faltered Ronald—

"My sister, Alice,—Miss Lisle," said Louis, giving vent to his long

concealed passion and spleen. "What am I to understand by this singularity of conduct, at once so cruel, so dishonourable, and—"

"Halt, sir! Stay—beware what you utter!" replied Ronald fiercely, in turn.

"As her brother, I demand an immediate explanation!" cried the other, starting from the ground, while he grew pale with anger.

"By heavens! you shall have none."

"None! Do you then—"

"Speak lower, sir. I am not accustomed to be addressed in this imperious way. Fassifern himself would not dare to speak to me thus. Restrain your manner, or the soldiers will observe it."

"By the gods!" said the other, in a tone of fierce irony, "I little thought to find that one of the Stuarts of Lochisla,—a family, a house, that have ever prided themselves on their notions of honour and noble feeling,—would behave thus to a gentle and too confiding girl. But I will arrange this matter at another time."

"And Lord Hyndford?"

Louis changed colour evidently.

"How, Mr. Lisle,—how can you thus get into heroics with me," said Ronald, observing it, "and in so bad a cause?"

"Cause, sir! Your conduct is at once unbecoming either a soldier or a gentleman," exclaimed the bold boy stoutly, "and a stern reckoning must be rendered at another time!"

Ronald smiled scornfully, while his eyes flashed, and his trembling fingers involuntarily sought the basket-hilt of his sword; but he passed his hand over his hot throbbing forehead, and subduing his emotions, turned haughtily upon his heel and withdrew.

And thus ended his first interview with the brother of Alice after their long separation.

* * * * *

Seeking a solitary part of the bivouac, he laid himself under the shelter of a bush, and yielding to the excessive fatigue that oppressed him, fell into a deep sleep, which was destined to be of very short duration. Meanwhile Louis Lisle, unable to enjoy the slumber which sealed the eyelids of the surrounding soldiers, sat listlessly by the flaring fire, watching its red crackling embers for hours, while his young heart was so filled with sorrow, indignation, and disappointment at what he considered the altered behaviour of Ronald Stuart, that he could have wept like a child but for very shame. At last, overcome by the wine, of which he had drunk deeply to drown thought, and by the heat of the blazing fagots, he stretched himself upon the turf and dropped asleep, to dream of his happy home and the fair sister he loved so dearly.

About an hour before daybreak, a time when the chill feeling of the atmosphere increases in Spain, Ronald was roused from his heavy slumber by some one shaking his arm.

"Another shot! Keep up your fire, Pedro!" he muttered, not knowing where he was. "Hollo! what is the matter?" he cried, as the glare of the fire, flashing on the epaulets of Louis, recalled his wandering ideas.

"Mr. Stuart, troops are in motion on the plain to the eastward. I considered it my duty to acquaint you," replied the other, and withdrew.

"They are either our own people, or some French party thrown forward from Merida. Stand to your arms, there. Men rouse,

rouse! Piper, blow the gathering. Mr. Lisle, get the men under arms,—let them fix bayonets and load: I will be with you immediately."

Moving in the direction of the advanced sentry who had given the alarm, he distinctly heard the rapid tramp of horse approaching towards them along the beaten track,—it deserved not the name of road, from Merida.

"Cavalry!" thought he, drawing his sword. "Now then for a solid square: I will not surrender to Dombrouski, without a show of fight, even should he come with all his lancers at his back, in their panoply of brass and steel." At that instant the cavalry halted; but the darkness was so great, that he could not discern any trace of them save their sabres, which glittered in the light of the watch-fire.

"Teevils and glaumories!" shouted the advanced sentinel, a bluff Gael from the forest of Athole, as he "ported," his musket. "Wha's tat?—wha gaes there?"

"What the devil does he say? The challenge was German, Wyndham," said a distant voice.

"Low Dutch, decidedly," replied another with a reckless laugh. "Perhaps they are some of the *chasseurs Britanniques*."

"What would bring them here? Some of the caçadores, probably."

"Who goes there? What troops are these?" cried Ronald.

"Hollos! all right. A reconnoitring party thrown out from the advanced guard of the second division. What are you?"

"A detachment for the first brigade."

"Scots?"

"Gordon Highlanders."

"Captain Wyndham took you for the drowsy Germans," said the officer, riding forward. "All is right, then: we belong to the 9th Light Dragoons, and General Long sent us forward to discover what the fire on the plain meant. We took you for some of the enemy, a party of whom we captured at Merida a few hours ago. Lord knows how they came there! I am sure old Sir Rowland does not."

"Then it seems the division is on a forced march?"

"Ay, the devil take it! It knocks up our cattle confoundedly," answered Wyndham. "The whole column will be here in an hour: but I must retire, and report to Long. Adieu. Party! threes about; forward—trot!" and away they went.

Scarcely had five minutes elapsed, when the advanced guard, consisting of part of the 9th and 13th Light Dragoons, with the 2nd Hussars of the King's German Legion, came up at an easy trot. Fierce-looking fellows were these last—wearing blue uniforms, large heavy cocked-hats, leather jack-boots, and enormous moustaches. The appearance of the brigade of horse, as they passed, was at once striking, martial, and picturesque. The red glow of the blazing fire glittered on the polished harness of man and horse, and the bright blades of the crooked sabres.

They certainly had not the showy and ball-room appearance of cavalry on home service, yet they were the more military and soldierlike. Continual exposure to all weathers had bronzed their cheeks, and turned the once gay scarlet coat from its original hue to purple or black, and the bright epaulets to little more than dusky wire. The canvass havre-sack and round wooden canteen hung at their backs; and the coarse yellow blanket, strapped behind the saddle of officer and private, did not diminish the effect of the scene. When the morning was further

advanced, and the banks of rolling vapour, which for some time rested on the face of the plain, rose into the air, Ronald found the baggage of the division close upon the spot occupied by the detachment which he now commanded. A strange medley the train presented. Horses, mules, and asses, laden with trunks, portmanteaus, bags, soldiers' wives and children, tents and tent-poles, bedding, and camp utensils; and here and there rode a few officers' wives on horseback, attired in close warm riding-habits. The whole of the long straggling array was surrounded by a guard with fixed bayonets, under the command of a field-officer, who spurred his horse at a gallop towards the party of Highlanders.

Stuart advanced to meet him. It was impossible to mistake the gigantic figure which bestrode the panting horse, the forest of ostrich plumes waving in his bonnet, or the stout oak staff which he flourished about.

"Egypt for ever!" cried the major, reining in his horse, which shook the sod beneath its hoofs. "Holloa, Stuart my boy, is it really you? Glad to see you sound wind and limb again. We thought the French had carried you off. Who are these with you?"

"The draft just come up from Lisbon. Allow me to introduce Mr. Lisle, of ours. Major Campbell," said Ronald, presenting Louis, with a stiff formality which stung the younger ensign to the heart.

"Lisle? Ah! glad to see you. Welcome to this diabolical country! We had a capital fellow of your name with us in Egypt. Many strange adventures he and I had at Grand Cairo. He left us after our return home: some relation of yours, perhaps?"

"My uncle; he is a younger brother of my father's," answered Louis, colouring slightly with pleasure.

"Ah, indeed! a devilish fine fellow he was; but perhaps he is changed by matrimony, which always spoils a true soldier, and cuts up the *esprit de corps* which we Highland troops have imbibed so strongly. I heard that he had married an English heiress, and now commands some foreign battalion in our service up the Mediterranean."

"The Greek Light Infantry."

"A splendid climate, their station. Little drill and duty,—wine to be had like water; and then the white-bosomed Grecian girls, with their bare ancles and black eyes! Ah! it beats Egypt, which is a very good place to live in, if one is a sheikh or pacha. And so you are really a nephew of my old crony and bottle companion, Lodowick Lisle? I remember his first joining us at Aberdeen, when we were embodied, in 1794. A handsome fellow he was; standing six feet three in his shoes; but I overtopped him by four inches."

"I have often heard him mention your name—Colin Campbell, at Inchavon—with terms of singular affection and respect."

"Have you, really? Honest Lodowick," replied the major, his eyes glistening. "Would that I had something in my canteen to drink his health with! Did he ever tell you of our march to Grand Cairo, when we were in Egypt with Sir Ralph?"

"I do not remember."

"'Twas a most harassing affair, I assure you."

"Now for an Egyptian story," thought Ronald, observing the major composing his vast bulk more easily in his saddle.

"It was sad work, Mr. Lisle, marching over dusty plains of burning sand,—the scorching sun glaring fiercely above us in a cloudless sky, blistering and stripping the skin from our bare legs and faces; while

our parched throats were dry and cracked, but not a drop of water could be found to moisten them with in the accursed desert through which we marched. Our shoes were worn out completely, and the hot rough sand burned our feet to the bone; and I assure you we were in a most miserable state when we halted among the mosques and spires, the gaudy kioaks and flowery gardens of Grand Cairo,—a place which at a distance appears like a city of candlesticks and inverted punch-bowls. Old Wallace, the quartermaster (a queer old carle he was), was sent about to provide shoes for the corps, who, by his exertions, were in a short time all supplied with elegant pairs of Turkish slippers, embroidered and laced, and turned up at the toes. Droll-looking brogues they were, certainly, for the Gordon Highlanders, in their garbered hose and filleadh-begs; yet, certes, they were better than nothing. But I was not so lucky as the rest. In all Grand Cairo there was not a pair of their canoe-looking slippers to be found which would suit me,—my foot, you see, is a size above a young lady's. And so I might have marched the next day in my tartan hose, had not Osmin Djihoun, a shoemaker (whose shop occupied the very site of the great temple of Serapis, which was destroyed by Theophilus the patriarch,—as you, having just come from school, will remember), undertaken to produce me a pair of shoes by next morning, under terror of the bastinado and bowstring, which the Sheik-el-Beled, or governor of the city, threatened daily to administer if he failed to do."

"Well, major; and your next day's march passed over in comfort?" asked Ronald, who had listened with impatience to this story.

"Comparatively so. Another affair I could tell you of, in which Lodowick Lisle bore a part. It happened at the Diamond Isle. The Diamond Isle, you must know, is a place at the mouth of the new port of Iskandrieh, as the Arabs call the city of Alexander the Great. Old Lodowick and I——"

"The baggage has all passed, major. You will scarcely overtake your command by sunset, if you wait to tell us *that* story; it is very long, but, nevertheless, very interesting. I have heard it some dozen times."

"A good story," replied Campbell composedly, "cannot be told too often. Therefore, the Diamond Isle—" But I will not insert here the worthy major's story, which he obstinately related, and with all the tedious prolixity and feeling of entire self-satisfaction that every old soldier displays in the narration of some personal adventure.

"By the bye, Stuart," said he, as he concluded, "have you anything in the pig-skin I see lying near the fire yonder?"

"Not a drop; otherwise it should have been offered long ago. I am sorry 'tis empty; but not expecting visitors, the last drain was squeezed out last night."

"*Carajo!* Well, Lisle, and how are all the depôt? How's old Inverugie, and Rosse of Beinderig,—the *Barba-Roxo*, as the dons used to call him?"

"All well when I left."

"Glad to hear so,—jovial old Egyptians they are; many a cask of Islay and true Ferintosh we have drunk together, and, through God's help, many more I hope to drink with them. The very idea of the smoking toddy—the lemons and nutmeg, makes me confoundedly thirsty."

"Doubtless, major, you had a morning draught at Merida?"

"The devil the drop, Stuart; but very nearly a wame full of cold pewter,—and ounce balls are hard to digest."

"How! What occurred?"

"It was unluckily my turn to be field officer of the guard over this infernal baggage, which, as we are retreating, moves of course in front of the column. We advanced as fast as possible to get into Merida, hoping to halt there and refresh. As we approached the bridge, I was drawing pleasant visions of the dark purple wine in the borachio skins at the wine-sellers in the Plaza, and was thinking of the long gulping draught of the cool Malmsey liquor I would enjoy there; when bang, whizz, came a bullet from the carbine of a French vidette, who appeared suddenly before us at the bridge-end. My belt-plate turned the shot, or else there would be a majority vacant at this hour in the Gordon Highlanders. The same thing happened to me once in Egypt, when I was there with Sir Ralph. I will tell you how it was."

"I would rather hear it at the halt, major, if it be all the same to you," said Ronald, interrupting the prosy field-officer without ceremony. "Well, and this vidette? His shot—"

"Caused a devil of a commotion among my motley command. The ladies shrieked and galloped off, the children cried in concert, the donkeys and mules kicked and plunged, the drivers lashed, and swore, and prayed, while the guard began to fire. I knew not what to do, when up came the 9th and Germans, sword in hand, sweeping on like wildfire; and entering the city, after a little fighting and a great deal of shouting and swearing, captured a hundred and fifty French lancers, all in their shirts. Their quarter-guard alone escaped by swimming the Guadiana; but their *chef d'escadre*, a French colonel, the Baron Clappourknuis, was taken in his saddle. You will see him when Sir Rowland comes up. But I must ride hard now, and regain my straggling command, which has left me far in the rear. Adieu, lads, adieu!" and away he went at a hand-gallop.

In a short time, the long line of dust which appeared in sight announced the approach of the division; and the bright steel points of standard-poles, of pikes* and bayonets, glanced "momentarily to the sun" as they advanced across the level plain. About a quarter of a mile off, moving forward on the right and left, appeared two dark masses of armed horse—Colonel Campbell's brigade of Portuguese cavalry, covering the flanks of the infantry. Eagerly did Stuart watch the dark forest of waving feathers which distinguished his own regiment, while he awaited their arrival standing apart from Louis Lisle, who eyed him with an expression of anger and disquiet. Since the departure of Campbell, neither had addressed a word to the other, and both felt how exceedingly irksome and disagreeable was this assumed indifference, this appearance of hauteur and coldness.

* Carried by serjeants at that time, instead of the fusee and bayonet now in use.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

CASTELLO BRANCO.

"Yet since thou wilt an idle tale of mine,
Take one which scarcely is of worth enough
To give or to withhold. Our time creeps on;
Fancy grows colder, as the silvery hair
Tells the advancing winter of our life:
But if it be of worth enough to please,
That worth it owes to her who set the task;
If otherwise, the fault rests with the author."

Macduff's Cross.—Prelude.

"WELL, Ronald, my *bon camarado*, and so you are really here, and in safety?" said Macdonald as he came up at the head of his subdivision. "Quite well now, I perceive. You received my letter from your servant, of course?"

"Yes. I have a thousand strange adventures to tell you of; but I will reserve them for the halt, which I suppose will be at the castle of Zagala. But meanwhile, let me hear the regimental news."

"Defer that till the halt also,—talking is dry work. A few rank and file were knocked on the head at Fuente del Maistre; but the officers, you may see, are all present. We feared you were on your route for France, when we heard that Dombrouski's dragoons were in Merida."

"A daring deed it was, for a handful of men to advance thus."

"Daring indeed!"

"But then they were Poles,—and the Poles are no common troops. Sad work, however, they have made at Merida. Every shop and house in the Plaza has been gutted and destroyed."

"More shame to the citizens! A city containing five or six thousand inhabitants, should have made some resistance to so small a party."

"Ay; but the cits here are not like what our Scottish burghers were two centuries ago,—grasping axe and spear readily at the slightest alarm. By Sir Rowland's orders, Thiele, the German engineer, blew up the Roman bridge, to prevent d'Erlon from pressing upon part of the 13th, who form the rear-guard."

"'Twas a pity to destroy so perfect a relic of antiquity."

"It was dire necessity."

"Did you see anything of our friends in the Calle de Guadiana,—the house at the corner of the Plaza?"

"Ah! Donna Catalina's residence? Blushing again! Why, no; it was dark, and I was so fatigued when we marched through the market-place, that I could not see the house, and Fassifern is so strict that it is impossible to leave the ranks. But I could observe that nearly all the houses above the piazzas are in ruins. However, we have captured nearly every man of the ravagers. A glorious-looking old fellow their commander is,—a French *chef-de-bataillon*,—Monsieur le Baron de Clappourknuis, as he styles himself."

"Clappourknuis? That has a Scottish sort of sound."

"The name is purely Scottish. I had a long conversation with him an hour since. He is grandson of the famous John Law of Lauriestoun,

and brother of the French general, the great Marquis of Laurieston.* He takes his title of Clappourknuis from some little knowes, which stand between the old castle of Laurieston and the Frith of Forth. What joy and enthusiasm he displayed at sight of our regiment, and the 71st! '*Ah, mon ami!*' he exclaimed, holding up his hands. 'Braave Scots,—very superb troupes!' he added, in his broken English, and the soldiers gave him a hearty cheer. He is a true Frenchman of the old school, and has a peculiar veneration for Scotland, which is only equalled by his bitter hatred for England; and all my arguments were lost in endeavouring to prove to him that we are one people,—one nation now. There is one of the 71st, a relation of the Laurieston family: I must introduce him to the baron, who seems to have a great affection for all who come from the land of his fathers. —A handsome young man, apparently, this Louis Lisle, our new sub."

"Very agreeable you'll find him, I dare say," replied Ronald, colouring slightly.

"A smart fellow he is, and will please Fassifern. His harness is mighty gay and glossy just now, but a night's bivouacking—by the bye, he is from Perthshire, is he not?"

"Ay, the mountainous part of the country,—my own native place. He comes of good family, and we are old acquaintance."

"Yet you seem to behave very drily to him: why you have not spoken to him since the corps came up."

"I have my reasons. A few words with him last night—I will tell you afterwards," said Ronald in confusion.

"Pshaw, Stuart! You should not dishearten a young sub, who has just joined by this sort of behaviour. Nothing disgusts one who has recently left his home with the service, so much as coldness on the part of those that he considered his friends. I shall see it made up—"

"I beg, Macdonald, you will not interfere in this matter," was Ronald's answer, with a vehemence that surprised his friend. "I am aware how I ought to behave to Mr. Lisle: we must be on distant terms, for the present at least."

"You are the best judge, of course," said Macdonald, with some confusion. "I merely meant for the best what I said. I dislike discord among brother officers."

"I am aware that your intentions were good—they always are so, Alister; but change the subject. How did you like Almendralejo?"

"Not well: a dull place it is, and the dons are very quarrelsome."

"Ay, I remember your letter mentioning two brawls with the inhabitants."

"Your servant, Mr. Iverach, and that rogue Mackie, of your own company, were the heroes of one."

"I should be glad to hear the story now. My servant has often mentioned it, when I had neither time nor inclination to listen."

"There is an old *abogado* at Almendralejo," answered Macdonald, "a fierce old fellow he is, with bristling moustaches twisted up to his very ears, and eyes like those of a hawk—the Senor Sancho de los Garcionadas, the people there call him, for shortness, but he has a name as long as a Welsh pedigree. This lawyer dwells, of course, in one of the best houses in the town, and on him Iverach and Angus Mackie were billeted. He has a daughter, whom I have seen on the

* To the political or historical reader, the names of the marquis and his brother will be familiar. The house of Laurieston stands within four miles from Edinburgh, on the south bank of the Forth.

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Brado, a fine-looking girl, with regular features, Spanish eyes, and Spanish ankles—quite bewitching, in fact; and although she has not Donna Catalina's stately and splendid appearance, yet she is plump as a partridge, and rosy, pretty, and merry as can be imagined. Her beauty completely vanquished the heart of Mackie, on whom she had cast favourable glances, for he is what Campbell calls one of the duchess's picked men (a strapping Blair-Athole man, from the mountain of Bein Meadhonaidh).

"A very agreeable correspondence ensued between them, but how they managed I cannot tell, as neither knew a word of the other's language, and Angus speaks more Gaelic than English; so I suppose they conversed by the eyes instead of the mouth.

"There is a French writer who exclaims, 'Ah! what eloquence is so powerful as the language of two charming eyes!'* and very probably Master Angus (whom I now see trudging away yonder with his knapsack on) found this to be the case. At last the *abogado* began to suspect what was going on, and his blood boiled up at the idea that the Scottish private soldier should have the presumption to address his daughter, and the treacherous old fox hatched a very nice, but very cowardly plan for cutting off poor Mackie.

"The Senora Maria he put securely under lock and key, and despatched a message to her cavalier that she would expect him that evening after vespers, sending at the same time a stout ladder of ropes, with which he was to scale her window. The plan succeeded to admiration. The savage old attorney and some five or six kinsmen, muffled and masked, lurked in a dark place, grasping their knives and crucifixes, for a Spaniard never thinks he can commit a murder comfortably without having his crucifix about him: if it contains a piece of the true cross, so much the better. Mackie came to the rendezvous, but attended by his comrade Iverach, and both had luckily brought their side arms with them. Scarcely had the unsuspecting gallant placed his foot on the first step of the ladder, when the concealed assassins rushed upon him, dagger in hand, from their ambush. The Highlanders drew and fought manfully with their bayonets, ran two through the body, and after receiving a few cuts in return, put the rest to flight; and so the matter ended for the night. But a terrible row was made about it next day. Cameron's quarters were besieged by all the alcaldes, alguazils with their halberts, abogados, and other rogues in the town, headed by the corregidor, demanding revenge. Passifern made a short matter of it with them, and desired the guard to drive them out. I know not how it might ultimately have ended, if the route for Villa Franca had not arrived just then, and put a stop to the affair by our sudden march. But since that occurrence I understand Mackie has not been the same sort of man he was—always grave, absorbed, and thoughtful. I fear he will give us the slip, and desert. The old lawyer's daughter seems to have bewitched him. He has more than once asked leave to return to Almendralejo, although he knows that it is now in possession of the enemy, and that his death is certain, should he be seen there again."

During the five days of the weary forced march across the Spanish frontier to the town of Portalagre (which signifies the "happy port") in Portugal, the same distance of manner and reciprocal coolness which we have described in a preceding chapter, subsisted between Ronald Stuart and young Lisle; and although secretly both longed to come to

* The author of the "Memoirs of Madame de Maintenon."

some satisfactory, and if possible a friendly explanation, their Scottish pride and stubbornness forbade them both alike to make the first advances towards a reconciliation. Louis had written to his sister, but had said nothing of Ronald, further than that he was well, &c.

At Niza, Ronald parted with Pedro Gomez, who had accompanied him thus far, but whom he now despatched to join his troop in a neighbouring province, giving him in charge a long letter to Don Alvaro. The morning the first brigade entered Niza, they found the greedy inhabitants, on their approach, busily employed in pulling their half-ripe oranges, shaking them down from the trees, and carrying them off in baskets with the utmost expedition, lest some of those soldiers—soldiers who were shedding their blood to rescue the Peninsula from the iron grasp of Napoleon! should have plucked a few in passing under the groves.

That night a part of the Highland regiment were quartered in the convent* of San Miguel, and great was the surprise of the reverend Padre José, and the rest of the worthy brotherhood, to find themselves addressed in pure Latin by private soldiers, who could not speak either Spanish or Portuguese. But to those who know the cheapness of education at our Scottish village schools, this will excite little or no wonder.

Next day the troops entered Castello Branco, a fortified place, situated on the face of a rugged mountain a couple of leagues north of the river Tajo, or Tagus, a city of great importance in bygone days. Its streets are narrow, close, and dirty, like those of all Portuguese towns, where the refuse of the household lies piled up in front of the street-door, where lean and ravenous dogs, ragged mendicants, and starving gitanas contest the possession of the well-picked bones and fragments of melons and pumpkins, that lie mouldering and rotting, breeding flies and vermin innumerable under the influence of a burning sun. Water is conveyed to the houses, or *flats*, as in ancient Edinburgh and Paris, by means of barrels carried on the backs of men from the public fountains. The streets are totally destitute of paving, lamps, or police; and by night the passenger, unless he goes well armed, is exposed to attacks of masked footpads, or annoyed by the bands of hungry dogs which prowl in hundreds about the streets of every Portuguese town, howling and yelping for food until one dies, when immediately it becomes a prey to the rest.

Major Campbell and Stuart, with some of the officers, were seated in one of the best rooms of their billet,—the most comfortable posada the place possessed, and truly the Peninsula inns are like no others that I know of. As they were in the days of Miguel Cervantes, so are they still; in everything Spain and Portugal are four hundred years behind Great Britain in the march of civilization.

In a posada, the lower story, which is always entered by a large round archway, is kept for the accommodation of carriages and cattle. It is generally one large apartment, like a barn in size, the whole length and breadth of the building, floored with gravel, and staked at distances with posts, to which the cattle of travellers are tied, and receive their feed of chopped straw, or of Indian corn which has become too rotten and mouldy for the use of human beings. The whole fabric is generally ruinous, no repairs being ever given; the furniture is always old, rotten, and decayed,—the chairs, beds, &c., being but nests for

* Convent is a term applied indiscriminately, in Spain, to houses occupied by either monks or nuns.

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myriads of insects, which render guests sufficiently uncomfortable. *Sabanas limpitas* (clean sheets) are a luxury seldom to be had; and provisions, a thing scarcely to be thought of in a Spanish inn. However, as Senor Raphael's posada was at some distance from the actual seat of war, it was hoped that his premises would be better victualled, and he was summoned by the stentorian voice of Campbell, the house being destitute of bells.

"Well, Senor de Casa," said the major, as he stretched himself along half a dozen hard-seated chairs to rest, "what have you in the larder? Anything better than *castanas quemadas* and cold water?—*agua hermoisissima de la fuente*, as they say here?"

"*Si, si*, noble caballero," replied the patron, as he stood with his ample beaver in his left hand, bowing low at every word, and laying his right upon his heart.

"Ah! Well, then, have you any beef or mutton,—roasted, boiled, or cooked in any way?"

"*No, senor officiale; no hay.*"

"Any fish? You are near the Tajo."

"*Si, baccallao.*"

"Pho! hombre! What, have you nothing else? Any fowl?"

"*No hay.*"

"Any fruit?"

"*No hay.*"

"*Diavolo!* Senor Raphael," cried Campbell angrily, after receiving the same reply to a dozen things he asked for; what on earth have you got, then?"

"*Huevos y tocino, senor mio.*"

"Could you not have said so at once, hombre? Ham and eggs,—excellent! could we but have barley-meal bannocks and whisky toddy with them; but here one might as well look for nectar and the cakes that Homer feeds his gods with. Any Malaga or sherry?"

"Both, senor, in abundance."

"Your casa seems well supplied for a peninsular one,—*pan y cebollas*, cursed onions and bread, with bitter aquardiente, being generally the best fare they have to offer travellers, however hungry. But *presto!* Senor Raphael; look sharp, and get us our provender, for saving a handful or so of rotten *castanas*, the devil a morsel have we tasted since we left Niza yesterday. And, d'ye hear, as you value the reputation of your casa, put not a drop of your poisonous garlic among the viands! Talking of garlic," he added, after Raphael had withdrawn, "I was almost suffocated with the fumes of it to-day, when we passed to the leeward of my namesake's Portuguese cavalry."

As the evening was very fine, they experienced no inconvenience from the two unglazed apertures where windows ought to have been, through which the soft wind blew freely upon them. The apartment commanded a view of an extensive plain, through which wound the distant Tagus, like a thread of gold among the fertile fields and enclosures of every varying tint of green and brown. *Golden* is the term applied to the Tajo, and such it really appeared, while the saffron glow of the western sky was reflected on its current, as it wound sweeping along through ample vineyards, groves of orange and olive-trees, varied here and there by a patch of rising corn. Far down the plain, and around the base of the hill of Castello Branco, the red fires, marking the posts of the out-lying picquets, were seen at equal dis-

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tances dotting the landscape; and their white curling smoke arose through the green foliage, or from the open corn-field, in tall spiral columns, melting away on the calm evening sky. Now and then the vesper-song from the little chapel of San Sebastian, half way down the mountain, came floating towards them, swelling loud and high at one moment, and almost dying away the next. Here and there, upon the pathway leading to it, stood a Portuguese peasant with his head uncovered, listening with superstitious devotion to the sounds coming from the little edifice, the gilded spire and Gothic windows of which were glittering in the light of the setting sun.

"A glorious view," observed Ronald, after he had surveyed it for some time in silence; "it reminds me of one I have seen at home, where the blue Tay winds past the green carse of Gowrie. That hill yonder, covered with orange-trees to its summit, might almost pass for the hill of Kinnoul with its woods of birch and pine, and those stony fragments for the ruined tower of Balthayock."

"Truly the scene is beautiful; but its serenity might better suit an English taste than ours," replied Macdonald. "For my own part, I love better the wild Hebrides, with the foaming sea roaring between their shores, than so quiet a scene as this."

"Hear the western islesman!" said an officer, laughing. "He is never at home but among sterile rocks and boiling breakers."

"You are but southland bred, Captain Bevan," answered Macdonald gravely, "and therefore cannot appreciate my taste."

"The view—though I am too tired to look at it—is, I dare say, better than any I ever saw when I was with Sir Ralph in Egypt, where the scenery is very fine."

"The sandy deserts excepted," observed Bevan. "Many a day, marching together, we have cursed them, Campbell."

"Of course. But where is that young fellow, Lisle? I intended to have had him here to-night, for the purpose of wetting his commission in Senor Raphael's sherry."

"He is at Chisholm's billet, I believe. They have become close friends of late," replied another officer, who had not spoken before.

"So I have observed, Kennedy; he is the nephew of an old Egyptian campaigner, and I love the lad as if he was a kinsman of my own. But here come the 'vivres!' Smoking-hot and tempting, faith! especially to fellows so sharply set as we are. Senor Raphael deserves a pillar like Pompey's erected in his honour, as the best casa-keeper between Lisbon and Carthagena."

While the talkative major ran on thus, the "maritornes" of the establishment brought in the supper, or dinner, on a broad wooden tray, and arrayed it on the rough table—cloth there was none—to the best advantage, flanking the covers with several leathern flasks of sherry, brown glazed jugs of rich oily Malaga, and round loaves of bread from the Spanish frontier.

"Now, this is what I consider being comfortable," observed the major, as he stowed his gigantic limbs under the table, and gazed on the dishes with the eager eye of a hungry man who had tasted nothing for twenty-four hours.

"We have been lucky in receiving a billet here, and are much indebted to the worshipful alcalde," said Bevan, interrupting a silence which nothing had broken for some time, except the clatter of plates and knives. "A little more of the ham, major."

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"And huevos? With pleasure. But eat away, gentlemen; be quite at home, and make the most of a meal when you can get one. I'll trouble you for that round loaf, Kennedy."

"Splendid bread, the Spanish."

"I have seen whiter in Egypt, when I used to visit the house of Capitan Mohammed Djedda, at Alexandria——"

"A visit nearly cost you your life there once, major."

"You remember it, Bevan; so do I, faith, nor am I likely to forget it. But it is too soon for a story yet; otherwise I would tell the affair to the young subs. Help yourself plentifully, Stuart. Lord knows when we may get such another meal; no store well for to-morrow's march."

"I am hungry enough to eat an ostrich, bones and all, I do believe," said Kennedy. "And in truth, this fare is the most delicious I have seen since I first landed at the Castle of Belem, some eighteen months ago."

"Simple fare it is, indeed," replied the major. "'Tis very well: the Senor Raphael's tocino is excellent, being cured probably for his own use; but his eggs are not so fresh as I used to get from my own roosts at Craigfianteoch, near Inverary."

"A deuced hard name your estate has, major. A little more ham, if you please."

"Bevan can pronounce it so well as myself, Bevan. Craig'fi'anteoch, —*that* is the proper accent."

"Meaning the rock of the house of Fingal, when translated?" observed Ronald.

"Right, Stuart, my boy; the rock of the king of Selma."

"It has been long in your family, I suppose?"

"Since the year 400. You may laugh, Bevan, being but a Lowlander, yet it is not the less true. Since the days of the old Dalriadic kings, when the great clan Campbell, the race of Diarmid, first became lords of Argyle," replied the major, with conscious pride, as he pushed away his plate and stretched himself back in his chair,—"Ardgile, or Argathelia, as it was then called. My fathers are descended in a direct line from Diarmid, the first lord of Lochow."

"A long and noble pedigree, certainly," observed Macdonald, with a proud smile, becoming interested in the conversation. "It outherods mine, though I come of the line of Donald, the lord of the Western Isles."

"Come, come, gentlemen, never mind descents: none can trace further up than Adam. Let us broach some of these sherry bottles," said Bevan, impatiently. "Pedigrees are too frequently a subject for discussion at Highland messes, and were introduced often enough at ours, when we had one. Yesterday, at Niza, at the *scuttle* there, which we called a dinner, the colonel and old Macdonald nearly came to loggerheads about the comparative antiquity of the Camerons of Fassifern and Lochiel."

"D—n all pedigrees!" cried Kennedy, uncorking the sherry. "I am not indebted to my forbears the value of a herring scale!"

"These are matters only for pipers and seanachies to discuss," said Ronald, affecting a carelessness which he was very far from feeling. Few, indeed, cherished with a truer feeling of Highland satisfaction the idea that he came of a royal and long-descended line. "Let the subject be dropped, gentlemen. Fill your glasses: let us drink to the downfall of Ciudad Rodrigo!"

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"Well said, Stuart," echoed Kennedy; "push the Malaga this way."

"I'll drink it with all my heart," said the major, filling up his glass; "let it be a bumper, a brimming bumper, gentlemen, the downfall of Ciudad Rodrigo!"

"Pretty fair sherry this, major."

"But it has all the greasy taste of the confounded pig-skin."

"Why the deuce don't the lazy dogs learn to blow decent glass bottles?"

"Try the Malaga. Fill up, and drink to the hearts we have left behind us!"

"Right, Macdonald,—an old Scottish toast," answered Campbell, emptying his horn. "But for Ciudad Rodrigo, I almost wish that the place may hold out until we encounter old Marmont, and thrash his legions to our hearts' content, eh! Bevan?"

"A few days' march will bring us close on Lord Wellington's head-quarters; and should the place not capitulate by that time, we shall probably act Vimiera over again in the neighbourhood of Ciudad Rodrigo."

"I shall be very happy to see something of the kind," observed Ronald. "I have been six months in the peninsula, and have scarcely heard the whiz of a French bullet yet."

"Should we come within a league of Marmont, your longing for lead will probably be gratified—as we used to say in Egypt, especially should he attempt to raise the siege. But drink, lads; talking makes one very thirsty."

"I am heartily tired of our long forced marches by night and day, and was very glad when, from the frontiers of Portugal, I looked back and saw the wide plains of Spanish Estremadura left so far behind."

"Many a weary march we have had there, Alister."

"And many more we shall have again."

"Never despond," said Bevan. "With honour and the enemy in our front—"

"As we used to say in Egypt—'Both be ——!' Carajo! I'll thank you for the sherry."

"But the troops of the Count d'Erlon—"

"Are arrant cowards, I think. They have fled before the glitter of our arms when three leagues off: the very flaunt of our colours is quite enough for them, and they are off double quick!"

"The soldiers of *la belle* France behaved otherwise in Egypt, when I was there with gallant old Sir Ralph. But we shall come up with them some time, and be revenged for the trouble they have given us in dancing after them between Portalagre and Fuente del Maistre."

"That was a brilliant affair," said Macdonald, "and you unluckily missed it, Stuart."

"Ay; but I hope Marshal Marmont will make me amends next week; and if ever Senor Narvaez comes within my reach—"

"Or mine, by Heavens! he shall be made a mummy of!"

"You could scarcely reduce him to anything more disagreeable, Alister. I saw some in Egypt a devilish deal closer than I relished," said Campbell, filling his glass as if preparing for a story, while a smile passed over the features of his companions, who began to dread one of those long narratives which were readily introduced at all times, but especially when wine was to be had, and the evening was far advanced. The smile, however, was unseen, as the dusk had increased so much that the gloomy apartment was almost involved in darkness. But

without, the evening sky was so clear, so blue and spangled, the air so cool and balmy, and the perfume wafted on the soft breeze from the fertile plain below so odoriferous, that they would scarce have exchanged the ruinous chamber of the posada in which they were seated for the most snug parlour in the most comfortable English inn, with its sea-coal fire blazing through the bright steel bars, the soft hearth-rug in front, the rich carpet around, and the fox-hunts framed on the wall.

"Mummies, indeed!" continued the field officer; "I almost shiver at the name!"

"How so, major?" asked Ronald. "What! a British grenadier like you, that would not duck his head to a forty-six-pound shot?"

"Why, man! I would scorn to duck to a shot from auld Mons Meg herself; but then a mummy, and in the dark, is another affair altogether. I care nothing about cutting a man down to the breeks, and did so at Corunna, in Egypt, and in Holland, more than once; but I am not over fond of dead corpses, to tell you the truth, and very few Highlandmen you'll find that are. Have I never before told you of my adventure with the mummies, and the *tulzie* that Fassifern and I had at Alexandria?"

"No—never!"

"Bevan knows all about it."

"He was in Egypt 'with Sir Ralph,' you know. It must be something new to us, major."

"I'll tell you the story; meantime light cigars and fill your glasses, for talking is but dry work, and there's sherry enough here—not to mention the Malaga—to last us till *reveille*, even if we drink as hard as the King's German Legion."

His companions resigned themselves to their fate—three of them consoled by the idea that it was one of the major's stories they had never heard before. Cigars were promptly lighted; and the red points, glowing strangely in the dark, were the beacons which dimly showed each where the others sat.

"Drink, gentlemen; fill your glasses, fill away, lads. However, I must tell you the affair as briefly as possible. I am field-officer for the day, and have to visit the quarter-guards and cursed out-picquets in the plain below: but I will go the rounds at ten, and desire them to mark me at two in the morning. They are all our own fellows, and will behave like Trojans, if I wish them."

"Well, Campbell, the story."

After a few short pulls at the cigar, and long ones at his wine-cup, the major commenced the story, which is given in the following chapter, and as near the original as I can from recollection repeat it.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAJOR'S STORY.

"Who has not heard, where Egypt's realms are named,
What monster gods her frantic sons have framed?
Here ibis gorg'd with well-grown serpents, there
The crocodile commands religious fear." *Juvenal*, Sat. xv.

"We are a fine regiment as any in the line; but I almost think we were a finer corps when we landed in Egypt in 1801. We had been embodied among the clan of Gordon just six years before, and there

was scarcely a man in the ranks above five-and-twenty years of age,—all fiery young Highlanders, raised among the men of Blair-Athol, Braemar, Strathdu, Garioch, Strathbogie, and the duke's own people, the 'gay and the gallant,' as they were styled in the olden time.

"There is a story current that the corps was raised in consequence of some wager between the Duchess of Gordon and the Prince of Wales, about who would muster a regiment in least time; and certainly, her grace got the start of his royal highness.

"The duchess (here's to her health,—a splendid woman she is!) superintended the recruiting department in famous style,—one worthy Camilla herself! With a drum and fife,—oftener with a score of pipers strutting before her,—cockades flaunting and claymores gleaming, I have seen her parading through the Highland fairs and cattle-trysts, recruiting for the 'Gordon Highlanders;' and a hearty kiss on the cheek she gave to every man who took from her own white hand the shilling in King George's name.

"Hundreds of picked mountaineers—regular dirk and claymore men—she brought us; and presented the battalion with their colours at Aberdeen, where we were fully mustered and equipped. Trotting her horse, she came along the line, wearing a red regimental jacket with yellow facings, and a Highland bonnet with an eagle's wing in it: a hearty cheer we gave her as she came prancing along with the staff. I attracted her attention first, for I was senior sub of the grenadiers, and the grenadiers were always *her* favourites. I would tell you what she said to me, too, about the length of my legs, but it ill becomes a man to repeat compliments.

"Right proud I was of old Scotland and the corps, while I looked along the serried line when we drew up our battle-front on the sandy beach of the Bay of Aboukir. Splendid they appeared,—the glaring sun shining on their plaids and plumes, and lines of burnished arms. Gallant is the garb of old Gaul, thought I, and who would not be a soldier? Yes, I felt the true *esprit du corps* burning within me at the sight of our Scottish blades, and equally proud, as a Briton, at the appearance of other corps, English or Irish, as they mustered on the beach beneath St. George's cross* or the harp of old Erin. The tri-colours and bayonets of France were in our front, and the moment was a proud one indeed, as we advanced towards them, animated by the hearty British cheers from our men-of-war in the bay. All know the battle of Alexandria. We drove the soldiers of Buonaparte before us 'like chaff before the wind;' but the victory cost us dear: many a bold heart dyed the hot sand with its gallant blood, and among them our countryman, noble old Abercrombie.

"Poor Sir Ralph! When struck by the death-shot, I saw him reel in his saddle, his silver hair and faded uniform dabbled with his blood. His last words are yet ringing in my ears, as, waving his three-cocked hat, he fell from his horse,—

"'Give them the bayonet, my boys! Forward, Highlanders! Remember the hearts and the hills we have left behind us!'

"Here's his memory in Malaga, though I would rather drink it in Islay or Glenlivet. We *did* give them the bayonet, and the pike too, in a style that would have done your hearts good to have seen. It was a glorious victory,—Vimiera, the other day, was nothing to it,—and well worth losing blood for. That night we hoisted the union on the old Arab towers of Aboukir, and Lord Hutchinson took command of

* St. George's red cross is the distinguishing badge of every English regiment.

the army. On the 18th September, 1801, we placed Alexandria in the power of the Turks. Our wounded we stowed away in the mosques and empty houses; our troops were quartered on the inhabitants, or placed under canvas without the city walls, and we found ourselves while there tolerably comfortable, excepting the annoyance we suffered from insects and the enervating heat, which was like that of a furnace; but the *kamsin*, or 'hot wind of the desert,' one must experience to know what it really is.

"When it begins to blow, the air feels perpetually like a blast rushing from a hot fire, and the atmosphere undergoes a change sufficient to strike even the heart of a lion with terror. The louring sky becomes dark with clouds of a bloody hue, and the sun, shorn of its rays and its glory, seems to float among them like a round ball of glowing purple, while the whole air becomes dense and dusty, rendering respiration out of doors almost an impossibility. Although during the reign of the terrible *kamsin* the sun was scarcely visible, the water in the public fountains grew hot; our musket-barrels and steel weapons, the wood, marble, iron, and everything, felt warm and burning. When the awful blast is discovered afar off, coming sweeping from the arid deserts of Libya and Arabia, the inhabitants of cities fly to their dwellings for refuge, and shut themselves up closely; the wandering Arab in the silent wilderness hollows a pit in the sand wherein to hide himself; and the unfortunate traveller, when surprised on the way-side, throws himself on the earth, with his face towards Mecca, while he covers his mouth and nostrils with the lawn of his turban, or the skirt of his robe: the very camel buries its head in the sand till the fearful blast is over. Hand me the sherry, Kennedy; the very remembrance of the *kamsin* makes me thirsty.

"Cameron—I mean Fassifern—and I lived together in the same tent, which was pitched without the city, in a spot where enormous ruins incrusted with saltpetre were piled on every side. I well remember drawing back the triangular door of the tent, and looking cautiously forth when the wind had passed. Here and there I saw the prostrate corpses of some Turks and Egyptians, who had been suffocated by inhaling the hot sandy air. They presented a terrible spectacle, certainly. They were swelled enormously, turned to a pale blue colour; and there they lay, rapidly festering and decomposing in the heat of the sun, although they had been alive and well that morning.

"By it I nearly lost Jock Pentland, my servant. I discovered the poor chield lying, half dead, at the base of Cleopatra's Needle, and had him looked to in time to save his life. Many of our men were dangerously affected by it; but when it passed away, all was right again,—and I remember how pleased Fassifern and I were, when, for the first time after the *kamsin*, we sallied forth on our daily visit to our friend Mohammed Djedda, a Turkish captain, with whom we had become acquainted in the course of garrison duty, and who had a very handsome house of his own within the walls of Alexandria.

"Cameron and I had become close comrades, then being only a couple of jovial subs. He was senior, and has got in advance of me; but since he has obtained command of the corps, he keeps us all at the staff's end, and acts the Highland chief on too extended a scale. Yet Jock (we called him Jock then, for shortness; but it would be mutiny to do so now) is a fine fellow, and a brave officer, and I pledge him heartily in Senor Raphael's sherry.

"To a stranger, the appearance of Alexandria is certainly striking.

The gigantic ruins of a people whose power has passed away, overtop the terraced roofs of the moderns. The embattled towers, the shining domes, the tall and slender minarets, rise on every side among groves of the graceful palm and spreading fig-tree, intermingled with the sad remains of the years that are gone, the crumbling temple, the prostrate pillar, and the mouldering archway! Friezes and pedestals, rich with carving and hieroglyphics, lie piled in shapeless masses, covered with moss and corroded with saltpetre, meeting the view on every side, and striking the stranger with veneration and awe, while his heart is filled with sadness and sublimity. The ruins of these vast palaces, which the great genius of Dinocrates designed, and which the immense wealth of Alexander erected, are now the dwelling-place of the owl and the jackal, the serpent, the asp, and the scorpion. The inhabitants of the modern city are indeed strange-looking beings, with brown faces, bushy black beards, and wearing large turbans of linen on their bald pates. Their dress appears like a shapeless gown of divers colours, enveloping them from chin to heel; a scimitar and poniard in the sash, slippers on the feet, and a pipe six feet long in the hand, completes their costume. Their women are muffled up to the eyes, which are the only parts of them visible; and then the shaggy camels and hideous asses with which every thoroughfare is crowded—"

"Well, major, but the mummies; you have not told us of them yet," said Ronald, becoming impatient.

"I am coming to the point," replied the major, not in the least displeased at the interruption, abrupt though it was; "but you must permit me to tell a story in my own rambling way. To continue,—

"The redoubtable captain, Mohammed Djedda, had become a very great friend of ours: we used to visit him daily, in the cool part of the evening, pretending that we came to enjoy a pipe of opium with him, under the huge *nopal* or cochineal-tree which flourished before his door. He knew no English, I very little Turkish, and Cameron none at all; consequently our conversation was never very spirited or interesting, and we have sat, for four consecutive hours, pulling assiduously, or pretending to do so, at our long pipes, without uttering a syllable, staring hard at each other the while with a gravity truly Oriental, until we scarcely knew whether our heads or heels were uppermost. We took great credit to ourselves for never laughing outright at the strange figure of the Capitan Djedda, as he sat opposite to us, squatted on a rich carpet, and garbed in his silken vest, gown, wide cotton pantaloons, and heavy turban, looking like Blue Beard in the story-book. You may wonder what pleasure we found in this sort of work, but the secret was this: Mohammed was one of the most fashionable old bucks in the Turkish service, and of course could not do without four wives,—no Turk of any pretensions to rank being without that number. These he kept in most excellent order and constant attendance upon his own lazy person, although he had a score of wretched slaves,—poor barefooted devils, who wore nought to hide their brown skins but a blue shirt, girt about their waist with a leather belt, and a red kerchief twisted round their crowns.

"But Mohammed's veiled and draperied spouses were the gentlest creatures I ever beheld, and not in the least jealous, because he entertained for them all the same degree of cool contempt; and often he told us, that 'women were mere animals, without souls, and only good for breeding children and mischief.' One brought his pipe and lit it, a second spread his carpet under the nopal, a third arranged his turban,

and a fourth put on his slippers; but he would scorn to thank any with a glance, and kept his round eyes obstinately fixed on the ground, as became a Turk and superior being. This strange old gentleman had two daughters; perfect angels they were,—seraphs or houri. We could not see their faces, all of which, with the exception of the eyes, were concealed by an abominable cloth veil, which it was almost incurring death to remove before such an infidel as me. But their eyes! By heavens such were never beheld, not even in the land of sunny eyes—so large and black, so liquid and sparkling! No other parts were visible except their hands and ankles, which were bare and white, small and beautiful enough to turn the heads of a whole regiment. The expression of their lustrous eyes, the goddess-like outline of their thinly-clad forms, made Cameron and me imagine their faces to be possessed of that sublime degree of dazzling beauty which it is seldom the lot of mortals to—"

"Excellent, major," exclaimed Alister; "of all your Egyptian stories, this is the best. Then it was the daughters you went to see?"

"To be sure it was! and for the pleasure of beholding them, endured every evening the staring and smoking with their ferocious old dog of a papa, who, could he have divined what the two *giaours* were after, would soon have employed some of his followers to deprive us of our heads. I am sure, by the pleased and melting expression of their eyes, that the girls knew what we came about, and we would certainly have opened a correspondence with them by some means, could we have done so; but as they were kept almost continually under lock and key, we never found an opportunity to see them alone, and letters—if we could have written them—would have been useless, as they could neither read nor write a word of any known language, their education being entirely confined to dancing, singing, and playing on the *'o-ód*, a kind of guitar used in Egypt: it is a plano-convex affair, which you may often see introduced in Eastern views and paintings.

"Well, as I related before, on the evening after the blowing of the *kamsin*, Fassifern and I departed on our daily visit, eagerly hoping that we might have an opportunity to see Zela and Azri, the two daughters, alone, as we marched the next day *en route* for that great city of the genii and the fairies, Grand Cairo, and might never again be at Alexandria. We were confoundedly smitten, I assure you, though we have often laughed at it since. We were as much in love as two very romantic young subalterns could be, and very earnest—hoping, fearing, trembling, and all that—we were in the matter."

"Well, major, and which was your flame?"

"Zela was mine. They named her 'the White Rose of Sidrah;' which means, I believe, 'the wonderful tree of Mahomet's paradise.' But to continue:

"On approaching the house, we found it all deserted and silent. The carpet and pipe lay under the shadow of the umbrageous nopal, but the grave and portly Mohammed Djedda was not there. The house and garden likewise were tenantless, and after wandering for some time among its maze of flower-beds and little groves, where the apricot, the pomegranate, date-palm, custard-apple, and fig-tree, flourished luxuriantly, we were met by one of Mohammed's half-naked slaves, who informed us—me at least, as I alone knew a little of his guttural language—that the Capitan Djedda, his four wives, his slaves, and all his household, were gone to the great mosque, to return thanks for the passing away of the *kamsin*.

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"As we were very much overcome by the heat of the atmosphere, we were about to enter the cool marble vestibule of the mansion, when the airy figures of the young ladies, in their floating drapery, appeared at an upper window.

"'Now or never, Colin!' said Fassifern. 'The young ladies are upstairs and the house is empty; we will pay them a visit now in safety.'

"'And what if old Blue Beard returns in the meantime with all his Mamelukes?'

"'Then there is nothing for it but cutting our way out and escaping. We march to-morrow, and the affair would be forgotten in the hurry of our departure. But is not death the penalty of being found in the chambers of Turkish women?'

"'So I have heard,' said I, shrugging my shoulders; 'but old Mohammed will scarcely try experiments in the art of decapitation while our own troops are so near. Yonder are the sentinels of the 42nd among the ruins of the Roman tower, almost within hail.'

"'Which is the way, Colin?' asked he, as we wandered about the vestibule, among columns and pedestals surmounted by splendid vases filled with gorgeous flowers.

"'Up this staircase, I think.'

"'But what the devil am I to say when we meet them? I know not a word of the language.'

"'Tush! never mind that, Jock; do as I do,' said I, as we ascended the white marble steps leading to the upper story, and passed through several apartments, the very appearance of which made me long to become Mohammed's son-in-law; but I can assure you, that never until that moment had I thought seriously of making the 'White Rose of Sidrah' Mrs. Colin Campbell of Craigfianteoch. The chambers through which we passed were singular, and gorgeously rich beyond conception; realizing all those ideas of oriental magnificence which are so well described in the 'Thousand and One Nights.' The walls, floors, and columns were of polished marble, pure and spotless as snow; and then there were arches hung, and pillars wreathed, with festoons and garlands of dewy and freshly-gathered flowers. Globes of crystal, vases of the purest alabaster, Persian carpets, hangings of damask and silk, girt with cords and tassels of gold, appeared on every side, and in many of the apartments bubbled up fountains of bright and sparkling water, diffusing a cool and delightful feeling through the close atmosphere of the mansion.

"The tinkling sound of the *'o-6d*, or Egyptian lute, attracted us towards the kiosk which contained the fair objects who had led us on the adventure. We raised the heavy folds of a glossy damask curtain, and found ourselves, for the first time, in their presence unobserved by others.

"The two graceful creatures, who were as usual closely veiled, sprang from the ottomans on which they were seated, and came hastily towards us, exclaiming in surprise mingled with fear and pleasure, '*Ma sha Allah! Ya mobarek, ya Allah!*' and a score of such phrases as the tumult of their minds caused them to utter.

"'*Salam alai kom*,' said Fassifern, meaning 'good morrow,' which was all the progress he had made in the oriental languages, and we doffed our bonnets, making a salaam in the most graceful manner.

"'Colin, tell them to take off their confounded veils,' whispered Cameron.

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"I asked them to do so in the most high-flown style imaginable, but they screamed out another volley of exclamations, and fled away to the further corner of the apartment, yet came again towards us timidly, while I felt my heart beating audibly as I surveyed the soft expression of pleasure that beamed in their orient eyes. They were evidently delighted at the novelty of our visit, though their pleasure was tinged with a dash of dread when they thought of their father's return, and the boundless fury of a Turkish vengeance. Zela placed her little white hands on my epaulets, and looking steadfastly at me through the round holes in her veil, burst into a merry shout of laughter.

"'Beautiful Zela,' said I, as I threw my arm around her, 'White Rose of Sidrah, at what do you laugh?'

"'You have no beard!' said she, laughing louder. 'Where is the bushy hair which hangs from the chin of a man?'

"'I haven't got any yet,' I answered in English, considerably put out by the question; but I was only a sub, you know, and had never even thought of a razor; my chin was almost as smooth as her own, and so she said as she passed her soft little hand over it. Again I attempted to remove the veil which hid her face, but so great was her terror, so excessive her agitation, that I desisted for a time. But between caressing and entreating, in a few minutes we conquered their scruples and oriental ideas of punctilio, when we were permitted to remove the lawn hoods, and view their pure and sublime features, with the heavy masses of long black and glossy hair falling over naked necks and shoulders, which were whiter than Parian marble. They were indeed miraculously beautiful, and fully realized our most romantic and excited ideas of their long-hidden loveliness.

"I had just obtained some half-dozen kisses from the dewy little mouth of Zela, when I saw Cameron start up and draw his sword.

"'What is the matter, Fassifern?' I exclaimed; but the appalling and portly figure of Mohammed Djedda, as he stood in the doorway, swelling with rage and Eastern ferocity, was a sufficient answer. In his right hand he held his drawn sabre of keen Damascus steel, and in the other a long brass Turkish pistol. Crowding the marble staircase beyond, we saw his ferocious Mameluke soldiers, clad in their crimson *benishes* or long robes of cotton, and tall *kouacks* or cylindrical yellow turbans, while their spears, poniards, and scimitars, short, crooked, and of Damascus steel, flashed and glittered in a manner very unpleasant to behold. The poor girls, horrified beyond description at being discovered in the society of men, of Christians, and unveiled too, were so much overcome by their terrors, that they were unable to fly; and calling on the bride of Mahomet in Paradise to protect them, embraced each other frantically and fondly, expecting instant death.

"'Here is a devil of a mess, Cameron,' cried I, drawing out Andrea. 'Let us leap the window, and fly for the camp!'

"'But their carbines throw a dozen balls at once,' was his hurried reply.

"'Shoulder to shoulder, Jack! now for the onset,' said I, preparing to rush recklessly upon them. 'We must take our chance of—'

"The rest was cut short by a slash the old savage made at me with his scimitar, which took three inches off the oak stick I cut at home in the green woods of Inverary, before I left them to follow the drum. My blood began to boil.

"'Mohammed Djedda!' said I, in Turkish, 'we have done no wrong; we are strangers among you, and know not the laws of the

land. Allow us to depart in peace; otherwise you may have good reason to repent,' I added, pointing to the tents of the 'auld forty-twa.'

"'Depart in peace, said you? Despicable giaour!' thundered he, his Turkish tone becoming more guttural by his ferocity. 'Never—never! By the sacred stone of Mecca!—by every hair in the beard of the holy Prophet!—by the infernal bridge which spans the sea of fire! slave of an accursed race, ye never shall! Never! I have sworn it.'

"I saw Cameron's eyes flash and glare as he prepared to sell his life as dearly as possible.

"'Then our steel for it, old man; and remember, should we fall, our friends in the white tents will avenge us.'

"'Thou too shalt die!' growled the old barbarian, discharging his pistol at poor little Zela, who fell dead without a groan, with the purple blood streaming from her white bosom, which I saw heave its last convulsive throb around the death-shot. The thick muslin turban of Mohammed saved him from one tremendous blow which I dealt at his scowling visage, but he sunk to the earth beneath the weight of the claymore.

"'*Allah, il Allah!* death to the soldiers of *Isauri!*'* yelled his infuriated followers, rushing madly on me, and in an instant I was vanquished: I received a terrible blow on the back of my head from the iron mace of a Mameluke. I remember no more than just seeing Cameron cut down two to the teeth, run a third through the brisket, leap the window, and escape.

"'Good bye, Cameron; gallantly done!' cried I, as I sunk stunned and senseless by the lifeless corse of Zela.

"How long I lay insensible I know not; but when my faculties returned, I found myself stretched upon the ground, which felt cold and damp, and in a place involved in the deepest and most impenetrable gloom. I found that the epaulets and lace had been torn from my coat, and an intense pain on the back of my head reminded me of the blow of the steel mace; and on raising my hand to the wound, I found my hair clotted and hardened with coagulated blood. Rats or some monstrous vermin running over me caused me to leap from the ground, and endeavour to discover where I was. This the darkness rendered impossible; but by the chill atmosphere of the place, the difficulty of respiration I experienced, and the hollow echoes of my feet, dying dismally away in distant cavities, I conjectured rightly that I was imprisoned in some subterranean vault. What the agony of my mind was when this idea became confirmed, you may better conceive than I describe. I recollected that the troops marched next day, and that unless Fassifern made some most strenuous attempt to discover and free me, I should be left at the mercy of the lawless Mohammed, either to be his perpetual captive in a dungeon, to be left to a slow lingering death by starvation, or a more expeditious one by some mode of torture, such as the most refined spirit of Eastern cruelty and barbarism could invent.

"In groping about, I soon came in contact with a stone wall, which I felt carefully all round, but no door or outlet could I discover. A succession of wooden boxes placed upright, sounding and hollow when I touched them, informed me at once of the truth,—that I was cast into one of those ancient catacombs which are so numerous under the city of Alexandria,—horrible caverns hollowed in the bowels of the earth, where the mummy-remains of the subjects of the Pharaohs, the

* Jesus Christ.

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Ptolemies, and others, 'outstanding the course of more than twenty centuries, lay swathed in their bandages and embalming! The blood rushed back upon my trembling heart, and every hair on my aching head seemed to bristle upon my scalp, as I staggered dizzily against the mouldy wall, knocking down half a dozen mummy-coffers, which fell heavily and hollowly upon the pavement.

"You may imagine what were my feelings when I reviewed my situation. I, a superstitious Highland boy, that used to shake in my brogues, like a dog in a wet sack, if I passed the kirk-yard of Inverary after nightfall, and never went into the dark but with my eyes closed tight, for fear of seeing something 'uncanny,' when I found myself in this gloomy repository of the dead, I was so confounded and terrified, that it was long before I recovered my self-possession so far as to cast a firm glance of scrutiny around me, and endeavour to discover some means of escape. I perceived with joy a faint ray of daylight streaming through a small aperture, which appeared nearly twenty feet above me.

"'Dawn has broken!' I exclaimed in sudden anguish; 'the troops must have marched! Cameron cannot have escaped Mohammed, or, oh, my God! surely he would not, without making an effort to save me, abandon me to perish here!'

"'Perish here!' repeated half a dozen dreary echoes. I looked around me in consternation. The sounds almost seemed to proceed from the red blubber-like lips of the frightful faces which I now perceived carved and painted on the outside of the upright mummy-coffers. They were the figures of the dead, and tinted with those imperishable colours with which the ancient Egyptians decorated the exterior of their temples. The large round eyes of these appalling effigies seemed to be staring hard at me from every dark corner, winking, goggling, and rolling; while their very mouths, capacious and red, expanded into a broad grin, methought, at my misery. Against the black wall they were ranked at equal distances, but here and there were some which had fallen to pieces, and lay upon the earth, exposing the decayed and mouldered corse standing stark, gaunt, and erect, swathed tightly in its cerements. Others had fallen down, and lay prostrate among little urns, containing, I suppose, the embalmed remains of the sacred ibis, the monkey, or other animals revered by the ancient idolaters. Enormous bats were sailing about, black scorpions, and many a huge bloated reptile, of which I knew not even the name, appearing as if formed alone for such a place, crawled about the coffins, or fell now and then with a heavy squabby sound from the wet slimy wall on the moist and watery pavement.

"By the grey light, straggling through what seemed a joint in the keystone of an arch above, I was enabled to note these things, and I did so with wary and fearful glances, while my heart swelled almost to breaking when I thought of my blighted hopes, and that home which was far awa—the green mountains of Mull and of Morven, and the deep salt lochs of Argyle; and, dearer than all, the well-known hearth where I had sat at the knee of my mother, and heard her rehearse those wild traditions of hill and valley, which endeared them more to me.

"'Have the followers of the false Issuri departed?' asked the guttural voice of old Mohammed or some one above me; while the cranny over-head became darkened, and the trampling of feet, together with the clatter of weapons, became audible. 'Have the eaters of pork and

drinkers of wine,—have the unclean dogs departed from the walls of Iskandrieh?' I listened in breathless suspense.

"'They have,' answered the yet more guttural voice of a Mameluke; 'they go towards the desert. May they perish in the sand, that the jackal and wolf may fatten and howl over their bones!'

"'Amen,—*Allah kebur!* Great is God, and Mahomet his holy Prophet!' replied the Capitan Djedda, while my heart died within me to hear that our people had departed from Alexandria. These were some of the ungrateful infidels for whom brave Sir Ralph, and so many gallant Britons, had reddened the arid sand with their blood!

"'Then bring ye up this follower of Isauri,' said Mohammed, 'and he will see whether his prophet, or all the dervishes and mollahs of his faith, can preserve him from the death I have sworn he shall die. Ere night, his carcass shall be food for the jackals; and while the unbeliever looks his last on the bright setting sun, Hadji Kioudh get ready the .....' What word he finished with I know not, but it was sufficient to strike terror to the inmost recesses of my heart. I well knew some terrible instrument of torture was named.

"What my emotions were I cannot describe, when I found death so near, and knew that I was powerless, defenceless, and unarmed, having no other weapon but my oaken staff, which, strange to say, I had never relinquished. I beheld the claw of an iron crow-bar inserted in the cranny which admitted light, for the purpose of raising the stone trap-door of the catacomb; and as the space opened, I saw, or imagined I saw, the weapons of Mohammed's followers flashing in the sun-light. My life never appeared so dear, or of such inestimable value, as at that moment, when I found myself about to lose it,—to be sacrificed like a poor mouse in a trap. I cast around a furious glance of eagerness and despair. A small round archway, which I had not before observed, met my eye; yawning and black it appeared in the gloom, and supported by clumsy short Egyptian pillars. I flew towards it, as novels say, animated by the most tumultuous hopes and fears, praying to Heaven that it might afford me some chance of escape from the scimitars of the savage Mahometans, who had already raised the trap stone, and lowered a long ladder into the vault.

"The passage was long but straight, and guided by a distant light, glimmering at the other end, I sped along it with the fleetness of a roebuck, receiving, as I went, many a hard knock from the bold carvings and knobby projections of the short dumpy pillars that formed a colonnade on each side. I heard the sabres and iron maces of the Mameluke warriors clatter, as successively five or six of them leaped into the vault, and set up the wild shout of '*Ya Allah!*' when they found that I was not there. By their not immediately searching the passage, I concluded that they were unacquainted with the geography of the place, and, in consequence of their having come from the strong glare of the sun, were unable to perceive the arch in the gloom of the cavern. They became terrified on finding that I was gone, and withdrew, scampering up the ladder with the utmost precipitation, attributing, I suppose, my escape to supernatural means.

"I kept myself close between the twisted columns, scarcely daring to breathe until they had withdrawn and all was quiet, when I again pursued my way towards the glimmering light, which was still in view, but at what distance before me I could form no idea. Sometimes it appeared close at hand, sometimes a mile off, dancing before me like a will o' the wisp. My progress was often embarrassed by prostrate

columns, and oftener by heaps of fallen masonry. More than once I was nearly suffocated by the foul air of the damp vaults, or the dust and mortar among which I sometimes fell. But I straggled onward manfully, yet feeling a sort of sullen and reckless despair, putting up the while many a pious prayer and ejaculation, strangely mingled with many an earnest curse in Gaelic on Mohammed Djedda, and the architect who planned the labyrinth, though, perhaps, it might have been the great Gnidian Sostrates himself.* After toiling thus for some time, until, wearied and worn out, I found myself in the lower vault of one of those large round towers which are so numerous among the ancient and ruinous fortifications of Alexandria. A round and shattered aperture, about ten feet from the floor, admitted the pure breeze, which I inhaled greedily, while my eyes gloated on the clear blue sky; and I felt more exquisite delight in doing so than even when gazing on the pure snowy bosom of the beautiful Zela, whom, to tell you the truth, I had almost forgotten during the quandary in which I found myself. The cry of '*Jedger Allah!*' shouted close beside the ruinous tower, informed me I was near the post of a Mussulman sentinel, and compelled me to act with greater caution. I heard the cry (which answers to our 'All's well!') taken up by other sentinels at intervals, and die away among the windings of the walls.

"By the assistance of a large stone, I was enabled to reach the aperture, through which I looked cautiously, to reconnoitre the ground. It was a glorious evening, and the dazzling blaze of the red sun, as it verged towards the west, was shed on the still, glassy sea, where the white sails of armed xebecs, galleys, and British ships of war, were reflected downwards in the bosom of the ample harbour. Appearing in bold light or shadow, as the sun poured its strong lustre upon them, I saw the long lines of mouldering battlements,—the round domes, the taper spires and obelisks which rose above the embrasures, where the sabres and lances of the Turks gave back the light of the setting sun, whose farewell rays were beaming on the pillar of Diocletian and the grey old towers of Aboukir, from the summits of which were now waving the red colours of Mahomet. But the beauty of the scenery had no charms for the drowsy Moslem (whose cry I had heard, and whom I now perceived to be a cavalry vidette), stationed under the cool shadow of a palm-grove close by. He was seated on a carpet, with his legs folded under him. His sabre and dagger lay near him, drawn, and he sat without moving a muscle, smoking with grave assiduity, and wearing his tall yellow *kouack* very much over his right eye, which led me to suppose that he was a smart fellow among the Mamelukes—perceiving, to my great chagrin, that he was one of Mohammed's savage troop. His noble Arab horse, with its arching neck and glittering eyes, stood motionless beside him, its bridle trailing on the ground, while it gazed with a sagacious look on the columns of smoke which at times curled upwards from the moustached mouth of its master, who was staring fixedly in an opposite direction to the city. I followed the point to which he turned his round glassy eye, and beheld, to my inexpressible joy, an English infantry regiment—Hutchinson's rear-guard—halted under a grove of fig-trees, but, alas! at a distance far beyond the reach of my call.

"I formed at once the resolution of confronting the sentinal, and endeavouring to escape. The moment was a precious one: the corps was evidently about to move off, and was forming in open column of com-

* A famous architect, who lived in the reign of one of the Ptolemies.

panies, with their band in the centre.* While I was collecting all my scattered energies for one desperate and headlong effort, a loud uproar in the distant catacomb arrested me for a moment, and I heard the terrible voice of Mohammed Djedda, exclaiming—

"'*Barek Allah!* we shall find him yet: the passage, slaves! the passage! By God and the holy Prophet, if the giaour escape, false dogs, ye shall die! Forward!'

"A confused trampling of feet, a rush and clatter followed, and I sprang lightly through the aperture into the open air. Stealing softly towards the unconscious Mameluke, I wreathed my hand in the flowing mane of his Arab horse, and seizing the dangling bridle, vaulted into his wooden-box saddle; while he, raising the cry of '*Allah, il Allah!*' sprung up like a harlequin, and made a sweeping stroke at me with his sharp sabre. He was about to handle his long brass-barrelled carbine, when, unhooking the steel mace which hung at his saddle-bow, and discharging it full on his swarthy forehead, I stretched him motionless on the earth. At that instant Mohammed, sabre and lance in hand, rushed from the ruined tower, at the head of his followers.

"'Hoich! God save the king—hurrah!' cried I, giving them a shout of reckless laughter and derision, as I forced the fleet Arab steed onward, like an arrow shot from a bow—madly compelling it to leap high masses of ruinous wall, blocks of marble and granite, all of which it cleared like a greyhound, and carried me in a minute among our own people, with whom I was safe, and under whose escort I soon rejoined the regiment, whom I found all assured of my death—especially the senior ensign, Cameron, who had got off scot-free, having related the doleful story of my brains being knocked out by the Mameluke soldier of Mohammed Djedda, a complaint against whom was about to be lodged with the *Shaik-el-beled* by Lord Hutchinson, commanding the troops.

"Well, this was my adventure among the mummies, and it was one that left a strong impression, you may be sure. How dry my throat is with talking!—Pass the decanters—the sherry-jugs, I mean—whoever has them beside him: 'tis now so dark, that I cannot see where they are."

CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER NIGHT AT MERIDA.

"The fire had resounded in the halls; and the voice of the people is heard no more. . . . . Desolate is the dwelling of Moina: silence is in the house of her fathers."—*Ossian's Poems.*—Carthon.

THE conversation which ensued on the close of the major's story, was interrupted by the clatter of a horse trotting along the causewayed street.

"That must be my batman, Jock Pentland, with my horse for the rounds," said Campbell, impatiently. "I am sure I told the Lowland loon not to come till the bells of San Sebastian rang the hour of ten."

"It is a dragoon, I think; but the night is so dark I am not certain," said Ronald, as he drew back from the open window. "He has dismounted here."

* Regimental bands always marched in the centre in those days.

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At that moment the door opened, and the host appeared, bearing a long candle in his hand, flaring and sputtering in the currents of air, while he, bowing very low, introduced the Condé de Truxillo, who advanced towards them, making his long staff-plume sweep the tiles of the floor at every bow he gave.

"Welcome, noble condé!" said Stuart, rising, and introducing him to the rest.

"Ah, Don Ronald, are you here? I am indeed proud to see you."

"You come upon us most unexpectedly, condé."

"I have been in my saddle all day," replied the other, casting himself languidly into a chair, "and have this moment come from the quarters of Sir Rowland Hill, for whom I had despatches—"

"From Lord Wellington?"

"Yes, caballeros."

"And Ciudad Rodrigo?" cried they, eagerly.

"Has fallen—"

"Fallen?"

"Two days ago."

"Hurrah! Well done, Lord Wellington!" cried Bevan, draining his glass.

"The devil!" muttered Campbell; "then we shall have no fighting with Marmont."

"He has retreated to Salamanca," said the condé, "abandoning to its fate the fortress, which I saw the gallant *Inglesos* carry by storm in the course of half an hour,—killing, wounding, and capturing three thousand of the enemy."

"Glorious news, Don Balthazzar," said Ronald. "But refresh yourself; here is sherry, and there Malaga, with cigars in abundance. After you have rested, we shall be glad to hear an account of the assault."

"I thank you, senor caballero," said the count, providing himself.

"What is our loss?" asked Campbell. "Have many *officiales y soldados* fallen?"

"What the allies suffered I have never heard,—at least 'twas not known when I left for Castello Branco; but two brave general officers have been slain."

"Their names, condé?"

"Crawfurd and Mackinnon; one fell dead while I was speaking to him."

"Gallant fellows they were, and countrymen of our own, too!" said Campbell, gulping down his sherry with a dolorous sigh. "But 'tis the fortune of war; every bullet has its billet,—their fate to-day may be ours to-morrow."

During a long discussion which ensued upon the news brought by the condé, the latter had applied himself to the remnants of the tocino and huevos, with infinite relish.

"I wonder what the despatches for Sir Rowland may contain?" observed Captain Bevan, supposing that the condé might throw some light on the matter; but the hungry Espanol was too busy to hear him.

"Most likely an order to retrace our steps," replied Campbell. "I would wager my majority against a maravedi, that you will find it to be the case."

"Very probably. The devil! we are a mere corps of observation just now."

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"It was not wont to be so with the second division," observed Kennedy.

"Never mind," replied Campbell; "it will be our turn in good time. I drink this horn to our most noble selves, and —— Hah! there are the bells of San Sebastian. I must be off to visit these confounded picquets; my horse will be here immediately."

The major rose and buckled on Andrea, surveying with a sour look the long line of equi-distant fires which were glowing afar off, marking the chain of out-posts, around the base of the mountain, and along the level plain.

"Here comes my batman, Jock," said he, looking into the street. "Pentland, my man; is that you?"

"Ay, sir!" replied a soldier, dressed in his white shell-jacket and kilt, as he rode a horse up to the door and dismounted.

"You are a punctual fellow. Desire Senor Raphael, the innkeeper, to give you a canteen full of aquardiente. Are the holsters on, the pistols loaded, and fresh flinted?"

"A's richt, sir," replied the groom, raising his hand to his flat bonnet.

"I will see you again, lads, when we get under arms in the morning," said Campbell, enveloping himself in an immense blue cloak.

"How, major! Are you so fond of bivouacking that you mean to sleep with the out-picquets?"

"Not quite, Alister; but I mean to finish the night at Fassifern's billet, and fight our battles and broils in Egypt over again for the entertainment of his host, a rich old canon, who is said to have in his cellars some of the best wine on this side the Peak of Ossian."*

"Do not forget, senor, to make the reverend Padre's borachio-skins gush forth like a river," said the condé. "A priest would as soon part with his heart's blood, as his wine to a stranger."

"I am too old a soldier to require that advice, Balthazzar," said Campbell, wrapping his mantle around his gigantic figure, which the Spaniard surveyed with a stare of surprise. "I regret you have not all invitations; but be as much at home here as you can, and be careful how you trust yourselves within any of Senor Raphael's couches. Peninsular—pardon, condé—I mean Portuguese posadas, are none of the most cleanly; and if you would wish to avoid being afflicted with *sarna* for twelve months to come, it would be quite as safe and pleasant to repose on the floor."

"The sarna! major," exclaimed Stuart; "what does that mean?"

"We give a less classical name for it at home in the land o' cakes," said Campbell, as he descended the stair, making the place shake with his heavy tread; "but you will discover to your cost what it means, if you are rash enough to sleep between the sheets of any bed in the posadas of this country."

Don Balthazzar returned next morning to rejoin Lord Wellington's staff at Ciudad Rodrigo.

His despatches contained an order to Sir Rowland Hill to return into Spanish Estremadura, the retreat of Marshal Marmont rendering the presence of the second division unnecessary in Portugal. Many were sadly disappointed when this order was read next morning in the hollow squares of regiments,—all having been in high spirits, and filled with enthusiasm at the prospect of a brush with the enemy before the expected capitulation of the celebrated fortress; but there was no help for

* A high peak of the Pyrenean mountains.

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it,—obedience being the first duty of a soldier. On the march towards Merida again, they consoled themselves with the hope that the Marshal Duke of Dalmatia, General Drouet, or some of the commanders in their front, would make them amends by showing fight. The British army had now been supplied with tents sent out to them from Britain; and they had the prospect of encamping with what they considered tolerable comfort during the summer campaign, and not lying, like the beasts of the field, without a shelter from the inclemency of the weather.

The same degree of coldness and hauteur was yet maintained between Ronald and Louis Lisle, who never addressed each other but when compelled by military duty to do so; and only then in the most distant terms, and studied style of politeness. The quarrel which had ensued on their first meeting was yet rankling in the hearts of both, and their fiery Scottish pride was fast subduing the secret feeling of friendship which still lurked in the breast of each.

The weather had become very warm, and the soldiers suffered excessively from the burning heat of the sun and the extreme scarcity of water, when traversing the wild and arid plains of Estremadura. Their rations were of such an indifferent quality, and so very scant, as barely to sustain life; and Ronald Stuart, although a stout young Highlander, felt often so much exhausted, that his heavy broad-sword nearly dropped more than once from his hand.

If such was his situation, what must that have been of the poor private soldiers, laden as they were with their heavy arms, ammunition, and accoutrements,—knapsack, great coat, blanket, havresack, and canteen,—a load weighing nearly eighty pounds! Day after day they marched forward in the face of the scorching sun,—hot, fierce, and glaring, hanging above them in the blue and cloudless vault, withering the grass beneath their feet, and causing the earth to gape and crack as if all inanimate nature were athirst for rain and moisture. Every breath of air they inhaled seemed hot and suffocating, like the fiery blast which gushes from an oven when the door is opened.

More than once on the march had Ronald relieved Louis by carrying his heavy standard, when he was almost sinking with exhaustion; but the want of water was the chief misery endured. The supply with which they filled their wooden canteens at the public fountains of Albuquerque, Zagala, and La Nava, became during the march heated and tainted, sickly to the taste and unrefreshing.

Now and then, when a spring was passed on the line of march, the soldiers, unrestrained by discipline, crowded eagerly and wildly about it, striving furiously, almost at drawn bayonets, for the first canteen-full, until the place became a clay puddle, and further contention was useless.

"O for ae sough o' the cauler breeze that blaws ower the braes o' Strathonan!" Evan would often exclaim, as he wiped away the perspiration which streamed from under his bonnet; "or a single mouthfu' o' the Isla, where it rins sae cauld and deep at Corrie-avon, or the foaming swirl at the linn o' Avondhu, for my tongue is amaist burnt to a cinder. Gude guide us, Maister Ronald, this is awfu'."

"O'ds man, Iverach, if I was again on the bonnie Ochil or Lomond hills," said a Lowlander, "de'il ding me gin I wad gie ower driving sheep and stots to follow the drum."

"Or staun to pe shoot at for twa pawbees ta hoor,—teevil tak' it!" added a Gordon from Garioch.

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"Hear to the greedy kite!" exclaimed the Lowlander. "An Aberdonian is the chield to reckon on the bawbees."

"Teevil and his tam pe on you and yours!" cried the Gordon, angrily. "Oich, oich! it's well kent that a Fifeman would rake hell for a bodle, and skin—"

The commanding voice of Colonel Cameron, exclaiming, "Silence, there, number four company! silence on the march!" put an instant end to the controversy.

"Hot work this, Stuart, very. Beats Egypt almost," Campbell would say, as he rode past at times.

Various were the emotions which agitated Ronald's breast, when he beheld before him the windings of the Guadiana and the well-known city of Merida, which was again in possession of the French. The jealous feeling with which he regarded Alice Lisle caused him to look forward with almost unalloyed pleasure to the expected meeting with his winning and beautiful patrona; and it was with a secret sensation of satisfaction—of triumph perhaps, of which, however, he almost, felt ashamed, that he had witnessed the proud blood mantling in the cheek of young Louis, when he (Ronald) was rallied by Alister, Kennedy, and others, about his residence at Merida, and the favour he had found with Donna Catalina.

At the fountain where Stuart had been regaled by the muleteers, a fierce struggle ensued among the soldiers for a mouthful of water. The French troops had maliciously destroyed the pipe and basin; the water, in consequence, gushed across the pathway, where the current had now worn a channel. Although the whole of General Long's brigade of cavalry had passed through it, rendering it a thick and muddy puddle, yet so intense was the thirst of the soldiers, that an angry scramble ensued around it to fill canteens, or obtain a mouthful to moisten their tongues, which were swollen, and clove to their palates. By dint of the most strenuous exertions, Evan Iverach had supplied his master's canteen with the sandy liquid, neglecting to fill his own, although, poor fellow, he was perishing with thirst. Ronald had placed it to his lips, but found the water so much saturated with sand, that it was impossible almost to taste it. He was replacing the spigot in the little barrel, when the exclamation of—

"My God! I shall certainly faint with exhaustion. Soldiers, I will give a guinea for a drop of water—only a single drop," pronounced in a remarkably soft and musical English accent, arrested his attention; and on looking up, he perceived a young lady, attired in a fashionable riding-habit and hat, pressing her graceful Andalusian horse among the Highlanders, who were crushing and jostling around the mutilated fountain. The wind blew up her lace veil, discovering a quantity of fair silky curls falling around a face which was very pretty and delicate, but thin, apparently from the fatigue and privations which were making many a stout soldier gaunt and bony. Many who had filled their vessels at the fountain, held them towards her; but she gratefully took Ronald's, thanking him by a smile from the finest blue eyes in the world.

"I am afraid it is impossible you can drink it," said he, as he held her bridle, "it is so thick with clay and animalculæ."

"It is very bad, certainly; but yet better than nothing," replied the lady, as she drank of it, quenching her burning thirst eagerly. "Ah, dear sir! I regret to deprive you of it; but accept my kindest thanks in return. My name is Mrs. Evelyn; Mr. Evelyn, of the 9th Light

Dragoons, will return you a thousand thanks for your kindness to me. But I must ride fast, if I would see him again before they attack Merida; and so, sir, good morning!"

She struck her Andalusian with her little riding-rod, and bowing gracefully, galloped along the line of the infantry column towards where the horse-brigade were forming, previously to attacking seven hundred foot, which, with a strong party of steel-clad cuirassiers, occupied the city. Every eye was turned on the young lady as she flew along the line of march, with her long fair ringlets, her lace veil, and the skirt of her riding-habit waving wide and free about her.

"God's blessing on her bonnie face!"

"Her een are as blue and bricht as the vera lift aboon!" exclaimed the soldiers, charmed with her beauty and grace.

"What a happy fellow Evelyn is to possess so fine a girl," said Captain Bevan.

"How famously she manages that Andalusian horse!"

"Had Evelyn been a wise man, he would have left her at home in Kent. He has a splendid property there—a regular old baronial hall, with its mullioned windows and rookery, surrounded by lawns and fields, where myriads of flies buzz about the ears of the gigantic plough-horses in the warm weather. How foolish to bring a delicate English lady from her luxurious home, to undergo the ten thousand miseries incident to campaigning!"

"But what on earth can have brought her up from the rear just now, when her husband's corps are about to drive the enemy from their position?"

"There goes Long!" said Campbell, exultingly flourishing his stick. "Keep up your hearts, my boys! It will be our turn, in a few minutes, to give them a specimen of what we learned when in Egypt with Sir Ralph."

It was Sir Rowland Hill's earnest desire to capture this small party of the enemy; for which purpose the cavalry were ordered to ford the Guadiana at some distance below the ruined bridge, to out-flank them, and, if possible, to cut off their retreat. The French battalion of infantry, dressed in blue uniform with white trowsers (rather unusual, the French troops being generally very dirty in their persons when on service), were seen in position on the opposite side of the river, drawn up in front of some orange plantations, while their squadron of cuirassiers occupied the avenues of the city, where their brass casques, steel corslets, and long straight swords were seen flashing in the noon-day sun. While the rest of the division halted, the first brigade, consisting of the 50th and 71st Highland Light Infantry, 92nd Highlanders, and Captain Blacier's German Rifle company, commanded by Major-general Howard, were ordered to advance with all speed upon the town; while the 9th and 13th English Light Cavalry, and king's German Hussars, boldly plunging into the Guadiana, swam their horses across the stream under a fire from the carbines of the cuirassiers, who, on finding their flank thus turned, fired one regular volley, which unhorsed for ever many of Long's brigade, and then fled at full speed. At the same time the battalion of infantry disappeared, without firing a shot, among the groves in their rear.

"Forward! double quick;" was the word; and, with their rustling colours bending forward on the breeze, the first brigade pressed onward at their utmost speed down the descent towards the city, and through its deserted streets, making their echoes ring to the clank of accoutre-

ments, and the rapid and rushing tread of many feet. The ultimate escape of the enemy was favoured by the delay caused in providing planks to cross the blown-up arch of the Roman bridge. Rafters and flooring were, without ceremony, torn from some neighbouring houses, thrown hurriedly across the gap, and onward again swept the impatient infantry, eager to come up with, to encounter, and capture this little band, which had so adroitly eluded them. But for that evening they saw them no more; and, after a fruitless pursuit for some miles, returned to Merida wearied and fatigued, when the shadows of night had begun to darken the sky and scenery.

Followed by ours, the enemy's cavalry had retired at a gallop along the level road to Almendralejo; often they turned on the way to shout "*Vive l'Empereur!*" to brandish their swords, or fire a shot, which now and then stretched a British dragoon rolling in the dust. As the first brigade were returning towards Merida, a mournful episode in my narrative came under their observation,—one which calls forth all the best feelings of the soldier, when the wild excitement of the hour of conflict has passed away. Near one of these rude wooden crosses so common by the wayside in Spain, placed to mark a spot where murder has been committed, lay an English troop-horse in the agonies of death; the froth and blood, oozing from its quivering nostrils, rolled around in a puddle, while kicking faintly with its hoofs, it made deep indentations in the smooth grassy turf. Beside it lay the rider, with his glittering accoutrements scattered all about. His foot was entangled in the stirrup, by which he appeared to have been dragged a long way, as his uniform was torn to pieces, and his body was soiled with clay and dust. A carbine-shot had passed through his brain, and he was lying stark and stiff; his smart chako had rolled away, and the features of a dashing English dragoon,—the once gay Evelyn, were exposed to view. Beside the corse, weeping in speechless sorrow and agony, sat his wife,—the same interesting young lady who had that morning drunk from Ronald's canteen at the fountain. Her face was ashy pale,—pale even as that of her dead soldier,—and she seemed quite unconscious of the approach of the Highlanders, who could not be restrained from making an involuntary halt. Her hat and veil had fallen off, permitting her fair curls to stream over her neck and shoulders: she uttered no sound of woe or lamentation, but sat with her husband's head resting on her lap, gazing on his face with a wild and terrible expression, while her little white hands were bedabbled with the blood which clotted his curly hair. From Merida she had seen him unhorsed, and dragged away in the stirrup by his frightened steed, which had also been wounded. With shrieks and outcries, she had tracked him by the blood for two miles from the town, until the exhausted charger sunk down to die, and she found her husband thus.

Colonel Cameron, on approaching, sprang from his horse, and raised her from the ground, entreating her to return to Merida, as night was approaching, and to be left in so desolate a place was unsafe and unadvisable. But she protested against being separated from the corpse of her husband, and, as it was impossible to leave her there, Cameron gave orders to carry Mr. Evelyn's remains to Merida. A temporary bier was made in the usual manner, by fastening a blanket to two regimental pikes: in this the dead officer was placed, and borne off by two stout Highlanders. Mrs. Evelyn mounted her Andalusian, which Evan Iverach had adroitly captured while it was grazing quietly at some distance, and Cameron, riding beside her, gallantly held her

bridle-rein as they proceeded towards the city. It was totally dark when the brigade, forming close column of regiments, halted in the now desolate Plaza.

The soldiers were instantly dismissed to their several billets.

That which Ronald had received was upon the hovel of a poor potter, residing near the convent of San Juan; but instead of going thither, he made straight towards the house of the old prior de Villa Franca, at the corner of the Calle de Guadiana, earnestly hoping, as he wended on his way, that it had escaped the heartless ravages he saw on every side of him.

"I will show this fiery Master Lisle of ours that I have more than one string to my bow, as well as the fickle Alice," he muttered aloud, and in a tone of gaiety which I must own he did not entirely feel.

That morning the mails had been brought up from Lisbon, and both Louis and himself had received letters from home; and Ronald concluded that there was still no letter from Alice, as Louis had, as usual, not addressed him during all that day. Old Mr. Stuart's letter was far from being a satisfactory one to his son.

"Inchavon," said he, in one part of it, "has now taken upon him the title of Lord Lysle, and has gained a great landed property in the Lothians. As these people rise, we old families seem to sink. All my affairs are becoming more inextricably involved: the rot has destroyed all my sheep at Strathonan, and a murrain has broken out among our black Argyleshires. The most of the tenants have failed to pay their rents; the farm towns of Tilly-whumle and Blaw-wearie were burned last week,—fifteen hundred pounds of a dead loss; and the damned Edinburgh lawyers are multiplying their insolent threats, their captions and hornings, for my debts there; and all here at home is going to wreck, ruin, and the devil! I trust that you keep the *Hon.* Louis Lisle at a due distance: I know you will, for my sake. Folk, hereabout, say his sister is to be married to Lord Hyndford, during some part of the next month."

The last sentence Ronald repeated more than once through his clenched teeth, as he stumbled forward over the rough pavement of the market-place. As he looked around him, his heart sickened at the utter silence and desolation which reigned everywhere: not a single light visible, save that of the silver moon and twinkling stars.

As he approached the well-known mansion where he had spent so many delightful hours, the gaunt appearance of the gable, the roofless walls, the fallen balconies, the shattered casements, informed him at once that "the glory had departed."

The house had been completely gutted by fire, and Ronald, while he gazed around him, recalled the old tales of Sir Ian Mhor's days, when the savage cohorts of Cumberland (Cumberland the bloody and the merciless) were let loose over the Scottish highlands. In the garden, the flower-beds were trampled down and destroyed,—the shrubbery laid waste,—the marble fountain was in ruins, and the water rushing like a mountain torrent through Catalina's favourite walk. The utmost labour had been expended to ruin and destroy everything, Don Alvaro's rank and bravery having rendered him particularly odious to the soldiers of the usurper, Joseph Buonaparte. Fragments of gilded chairs, hangings, and books, were tossing about in all directions. Some of the latter Ronald took up, and saw by the light of the moon that they had belonged to Catalina's little library (books are a scarce commodity in Spain), and were her most favourite authors. There

was the romance of "Amadis de Gaul," written by that good and valiant knight, Vasco de Loberia, "Lopez de Ruedas," "Armelina," "Eusenia," "Los Enganados," all separate works, and other dramas and pastorals. But one richly bound little book, printed at Salamanca, the "Vidas de los Santos," upon which her own hand had written her name, he kept as a remembrance—he scarcely required one,—and bestowing a hearty malediction on the French, against whom he now felt the bitterest personal enmity, he left the place with an anxious and heavy heart, intending to question the first Espanol he should meet as to the fate of the family of Villa Franca. He encountered several in the streets, but none could give him the least information; and as he was weary with the fatigues of the day, he retired to his billet at the house of the potter. On the way thither, a ray of light shining through a low barred window, and the wailing as of one in deep distress, attracted his attention. On looking in, he perceived the lady-like and graceful figure of Mrs. Evelyn bending over a table, on which, muffled up in a cavalry cloak, lay the cold remains of him she loved with her whole heart. A wearied dragoon, booted and accoutred, lay asleep in one corner; in another were grouped some Irish soldiers' wives, smoking and sipping aquardiente, while they listened in silence to the sorrowful moanings of the young lady, and the lowly-muttered yet earnest prayer which a poor Cistertian padre, almost worn out with years and privation, offered up for the soul of the deceased, around whose bier he had placed several candles, which he had consecrated by lighting them at the shrine of San Juan. The chamber was ruinous and desolate, without either fire or furniture. It was in sooth a sad and strange situation for the poor girl, whose fair head rested on the bosom of the slain; and Ronald, as he turned away, thought of what her gay and fashionable friends at home would have said could they have seen her then,—bowed down in absorbing sorrow, without a friend to comfort her, and surrounded by squalid misery and desolation.

* * * * * *

About daybreak next morning Evelyn was buried hastily in a grassy spot among the ruins of the castle of Merida,—the alcalde having piously objected to the burial of a *heretic* in consecrated ground. Without other shroud but his tattered and bloody uniform,—without other coffin than his large military cloak,—he was lowered into the hastily made tomb. The chaplain of the brigade performed the burial service, and he was hurriedly covered up. A volley of carbines from his troop, and the sobs of his young widow as she stood by, leaning on the arm of Fassifern, were the last requiem of the English dragoon.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OUT-PICQUET.

> "Then she is still alive:—
> My lovely Lucrece in a Roman camp,
> Midst hostile Tarquins! Would she had been slain!"
>
> *Fate of Capua: a Tragedy.*

THE *patron* of Ronald's billet could not give him any information about Donna Catalina, or any of the inmates of her mansion—the hotel de Villa Franca, as the citizens named it. He knew that it had been occupied by the French, whose commanding officer quartered himself

upon it as the best house in the place, and that his soldiers had burnt it when they saw that they should be compelled to abandon Merida, on the second advance of the British. From the first occupation of the town by the enemy, none of the Villa Franca family had been seen. This was all the information he could obtain; and Ronald was led to conclude that Catalina and her cousin had escaped, and might be at Majorga, or some other town on the Spanish frontiers.

The poor *patron* was a potter by trade, and made brown earthenware crocks and jars, which he retailed through Estremadura, in panniers slung on the back of a mule; but he earned barely sufficient to support his wife and family. Nevertheless, to show their loyalty to King Ferdinand, and their gratitude to his allies, the *patrona* had, by dint of much exertion, procured for Ronald, on the morning of his departure, what was considered in Spain a tolerable breakfast.

On the wooden table was placed a large crock full of boiled pork and peas, opposite to which stood a jar of goat's milk, plates of eggs, dried raisins, and white bread,—even coffee was on the table; a display altogether of viands that raised the wonder and increased the appetites of the six hungry children who crowded round the board, holding up their little brown hands with many exclamations of wonder, and cries to their *madre* and *padre* to help them; but their parents were intent on doing the honours of the table to the noble caballero.

In one corner of the miserable apartment lay the glossy hide of an English horse. Ronald, by some particular spots, recognised it to be that of Evelyn's charger, about the flaying of which the host had been employed since daybreak, intending, as he said, to make it into caps and shoes for his children. The latter were all swarthy and active, but sadly disguised by rags and filth, which obscured the natural beauty of their Spanish faces and figures, excepting one little girl, about ten years of age, who appeared to be her mother's pet, and consequently was more neatly dressed. Ronald was often amused at the looks of wonder with which this little creature watched him while eating—keeping at a distance, as if he were an ogre; but when she became more familiar, venturing to touch the black feathers of his bonnet, and other parts of his glittering dress, though always keeping close to the short skirt of the *madre's* petticoat, as if she feared being eaten up, or carried off for some future meal, by the strange caballero, the richness of whose uniform filled the little boys with wonder and envy.

At last, by dint of much entreaty, she permitted herself to be drawn towards him. Raising up her radiant eyes, she took a copper crucifix from her bosom, and asked him if the people in his country wore a thing like that. On his telling her no, she broke away from his arm, and crying, "*O mi madre*—the heretic! the devil!" hid her face in her mother's skirt; while the rest of the children shrunk around their father, grasping his legs for safety, and even *he* seemed much discomposed. Not liking the idea of being regarded as a bugbear, Ronald, in the grey daylight, finished his breakfast as speedily as possible, and was hurried in doing so by the warning bugles for the march.

Ranald Dhu and his six pipers blowing the gathering, in concert with the drums of other corps beating the "assembly," in the Plaza, soon followed, and he left the house of the hospitable but superstitious potter, who would not accept a single maravedi for the entertainment he had given—a circumstance which Ronald did not regret, his pecuniary affairs not being then in a very flourishing condition, as the troops were three months' pay in arrear.

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When the second division approached Almendralejo, they found that it had been abandoned by the enemy in the night. As on the march of the preceding day, the troops suffered greatly by thirst and the intense heat of the weather; and as the regiments passed through in succession, the inhabitants were employed for hours handing water through their barred windows* to the soldiers, while crowds in the streets were kept running to and fro from the fountains with all sorts of vessels, as if a general conflagration had taken place.

"*Viva Ferdinando! muera Napoleon!*" cried a soft voice from the balcony of a house near the *Casa de Ayuntamiento*, the tall spire of which is visible for leagues around.

"Who can that handsome girl be—she with the tight bodice and braided hair?" asked Stuart of Alister, as the corps halted, for the usual rest of five minutes, in front of the town-house.

"Handsome girl! How should I know, Ronald. Where?"

"Leaning over the antique stone balcony: she has tossed a chaplet among the men at the other flank of the company."

"And one fellow has placed it on the point of his bayonet. That is the Senora Maria I told you of."

"What! the daughter of the *abogado?*"

"The same. I used to meet her often at the Prado and at church, when we lay here. Her true knight, Angus Mackie, has obtained the wreath, I perceive."

"A handsome girl, indeed! The flowers were intended for him, doubtless."

"And there is the *abogado* himself," exclaimed Macdonald. "What the devil is the old fellow about?"

While they were speaking, a fierce-looking little Spaniard, with a bald head and large grey moustaches, wearing an old-fashioned doublet of black cloth slashed on the breast with red, rushed into the balcony, and grasping the young lady by the arm, drew her roughly into the house, dashing to the casement with such violence that several panes of glass were shattered,—a damage, which he was observed a minute afterwards to be inspecting with a rueful countenance, glass being an expensive article in Spain. He withdrew with a fierce aspect, as a loud laugh of derision arose from the companies of Highlanders in the street.

To describe the wearying marches performed by the troops under Sir Rowland Hill's command in that province of Spain, would be at once useless and uninteresting. Scouring the country of the enemy, they had many a march and counter-march between Merida, La Zarza, La Querena, Medellin, and Don Benito. From the last two the enemy were driven, but not without some fighting, especially at Don Benito. During that week often on the march, as they traversed the lofty sierras or level plains, they heard, mellowed by distance, the roar of the far artillery, which announced that the strong city of Badajos had been besieged by Lord Wellington, by whose orders Sir Rowland's division advanced towards that place, to form the covering army.

On the evening when it was known the fortress would be stormed, while the greatest anxiety pervaded every breast for the success of the great attempt, Hill's division halted and encamped near the village of Lobon just about sunset. Making a corresponding movement to form a junction with the second division, Sir Thomas Graham, "the hero of Barossa," hovered with his troops in the direction of the heights of

* The lower windows in Spain are all barred.

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Albuera, ready to concentrate and repel together any attempt which the great Duke of Dalmatia with his legions might make to relieve the beleaguered garrison of General Phillipon at Badajoz, which was a few miles distant, in the rear of the hamlet of Lobon.

Although the troops encamped, all were in readiness to march at a moment's notice to sustain the besieging army, if they should fail in carrying the place. Scarcely had they halted, before the grand guards of cavalry were formed, and the out-picquets, to be furnished from the first brigade, paraded and despatched to their several posts where pointed out by the major of brigade.

With some other officers this exciting duty fell upon Ronald, who, with a picquet of twenty Highlanders, was directed to march to a given distance into the plain in front of Lobon, halt his party, and throw forward his chain of advanced sentries, extending them so that they could keep up the line of communication with those of other picquets on the right and left, and to double them should the weather thicken during the night.

"By what shall I know where to halt the main body of my picquet, major?" asked Ronald, looking rather blankly towards the waste expanse of desert plain, which extends for more than seven leagues around Badajoz. "It is as level as the very sea; nothing bounds it but the distant heights of Albuera."

"March *on* that star," said W—— technically, as he raised himself in his stirrups, and pointed towards a bright planet which was twinkling where the lingering streaks of yellow edged the dark horizon, glowing like heated bars of gold through openings in the dusky masses of clouds, which appeared to rest o'er Albuera, the position of Graham. "You will march straight *upon* it, and halt your picquet where you find a man's head stuck upon a pole."

"Upon a pole!"

"Ay. Queer mark, is it not?"

"Very. I am to halt there?"

"A dismal thing to have beside one for a whole night,—in a place as dreary, and eerie too, as the pass of Drumouchter."

"Is it the head of a murderer?"

"Yes. His body is buried beneath it,—a common practice in this part of the country, I believe."

"A man's head used to be quite a common mark when I was in Egypt with Sir Ralph Abercrombie," chimed in Campbell, who had stretched himself on the dewy grass near. "I have seen a corps of turbaned Turks, reviewed near Alexandria, using the spiked heads of Frenchmen as we do our red camp-colours, as points to wheel on."

"You had better take up your ground, Mr. Stuart," said the brigade major, to cut short any intended story, "and remember carefully to make yourself master of your situation, by examining, not only the space you actually occupy, but the heights within musket-shot, the roads and paths leading to or near the post, ascertaining their breadth and practicability for cavalry and cannon, and to ensure a ready and constant communication with the adjoining posts and videttes,—in the day by signals, in the night by patrols," &c.; and the old fellow did not cease his long quotation from the "Regulations," which he had gotten by rote, until compelled to do so by want of breath.

When he made an end, and had ridden off, Ronald marched his

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picquet in the direction pointed out, keeping as a guide the star already mentioned. He soon found the halting-place, and there, sure enough, was a human head placed upon a pole about ten feet high; and a more grisly, hairy, ferocious, and terrible face than it presented, human eyes never beheld. In ferocity its expression was that of Narvaez Cifuentes, but it was fixed and rigid,—the eyes glassy and bursting from the sockets,—the jaws wide and open, displaying a formidable row of large white teeth. It was much decayed by the heat of the weather, although it had been only three days exposed; and as the breeze blew swiftly past, it caused the long damp tresses of black hair to wave around the livid brow with an effect at once strange and terrible.

Having posted his line of sentries to the best advantage, showing them in what direction they were to keep a "sharp look-out,"—the direction where Marshal Soult lay,—he returned to the spot, where, stretched upon the turf among the rest of the soldiers, he lay listening to the distant thunder of artillery, and watching the lurid light which filled the horizon, continually increasing and waning as the tide of conflict turned on the battlements of Badajoz. More vividly at times the red light flashed across the sky, and louder at times came the boom of the heavy cannon, as the salvoes were discharged against the walls of the doomed city; and while the soldiers looked and listened, they thought of the blood and slaughter in which they might soon bear a part, should the present besiegers fail in the assault. Although at that hour hundreds—ay, thousands, were being swept into eternity, the soldiers cared not for it, apparently; many a tale was told at which they laughed heartily, and many a reminiscence narrated of Bergen-op-Zoom, Egmont-op-Zee, Mandora, Corunna, and other fields and countless frays, in which some of them had borne a part.

It was a fine moonlight night: the most distant part of the plain could be distinctly seen, and the myriads of stars shone joyously, as if to rival the radiance of their queen, while every blade of grass, and every leaf of the scattered shrubbery, so common on Spanish plains, glittered as if edged with liquid silver. From the dark village of Lobon, and the white glimmering tents of the encampment, arose the hum of voices; from the plain through which wound the Guadiana, came the murmur of its current; and save these, no sound broke the stillness of the hour but the roar of Badajoz, which growled and sounded afar like thunder among distant hills.

While Ronald was regaling himself upon a mess, consisting of a few ounces of ration-beef fried in a camp-kettle lid, with a handful of *garbanzos* or beans, which Evan had brought him from the adjacent village, his attention was aroused by the glitter of steel on the plain, advancing, as he imagined, from the direction where Soult was known to be, and from which he was expected to make some demonstration to relieve General Phillipon's garrison.

Ronald was instantly on the alert. He sprang to his feet,—ordered the picquet to "stand to their arms," himself advancing a little to the front, to reconnoitre.

Perhaps there is no situation more exciting to any officer, especially a young one, than out-picquet duty: he is left to act entirely for himself,—to rely on his own judgment, and so much depends upon him in many ways, that he is apt to grow bewildered. The responsibility is indeed great, when the very fate of a kingdom may

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depend on the alertness of his sentinels, and the posts he has assigned to them.

Fully alive to all the duties of his situation, Ronald moved anxiously to the front, and beheld a dark group advancing furiously along the plain at full gallop, making straight for his post, with steel casques and tall lances glittering; but that they were only six armed horsemen he could see distinctly, and the cry of "*Amigos! amigos a la guerra de la Independencia! Viva Espana! Viva Espana!*" in pure Castilian, assured him that they were Spaniards; and he sprang forward just in time to arrest the arm of his advanced sentinel, who had levelled his musket to fire, a circumstance which would have caused the whole encamped division to get under arms.

Another moment, and the strangers came up, the hoofs of their panting steeds shaking the earth, and tearing the turf as they were suddenly reined in, while the white foam fell from their dilated nostrils. A glance showed Ronald that they were six lances of Don Alvaro's troop, escorting a party of Spanish ladies, who to his no small surprise were all mounted like men, wearing wide trowsers and broad flapping sombreros, with veils and long waving plumes. Although this mode of riding surprised the Scot very much, it is one extremely common in some parts of Spain. Raising his hand to his bonnet, he inquired which way they had come?

"Ah! Don Ronald,—have you quite forgotten me, and the sad night we spent in the diabolical cavern at La Nava?" exclaimed Pedro Gomez, dropping the point of his lance, and causing his mettlesome steed to curvet in a style more like unto a knight of chivalry than a serjeant of dragoons.

"How! Pedro, my bon camarado, is this you? Why—how—which way are you riding?"

"Commanding an escort, *senor officiale;* travelling with four ladies of our regiment from Segura de Leon to Idanda Nova, to keep them out of harm's way."

"And the *senoritas*—"

"*Senoritas? Pho! Somos todos hombres,*" said one contemptuously in Spanish.

"All men?" reiterated Ronald in surprise.

A burst of laughter from the fair speaker followed; and bending her face close to his,—so close that her soft curls fell upon it, she added, "Inesella de Truxillo. I knew not that my features were so easily forgotten, even by the admirers of my cousin."

"Senora, how happy am I to see you here, and in safety! The ravages at Merida led me to expect the worst. And your cousin, Donna Catalina,—she is of course, with you?" said Ronald, looking anxiously at the faces of the other three ladies.

"O most unfortunate Catalina;" exclaimed Inesella, beginning to weep, "I fear she is for ever lost to us."

"How, Donna Inesella! Speak, for Heaven's sake!" said Ronald, while his heart fluttered with agitation.

"*O Juan de Dios!* be her protection. She was carried off by the enemy, while I escaped in consequence of the Count d'Erlon's mandate. The house was destroyed by fire, and our miserable uncle, the poor dear old padre, perished in it."

A deep malediction was growled by the escort, who reined their horses back a few paces.

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"The demons! and by whose order was that done?"

"Their *chef d'escadre*, the Baron de Clappourknuis, or some such name."

"He is now a prisoner in the castle of Belem; but Catalina—"

"Was torn from my arms by force. A field-officer of the French guards carried her off across the bow of his saddle; I heard her fearful cries as he swam his horse across the Guadiana, on the night that the British returned and attacked Merida. I have been wandering about in several places since then, and am anxious to reach Idanda Nova, Idanha a Velha, or any place of safety, until all this terrible work is over. Mother of God! look towards Badajoz! The sky seems all on fire! Alas! the poor soldiers—"

"Has Don Alvaro heard of his sister's fate?"

"O yes, senor. Poor Alvaro! I have had sad work cheering him under the misfortune. He is now my husband," added the graceful donna, blushing deeply, while her usually soft voice sunk into a whisper.

"Oh, indeed! I am most happy, Donna Inesella, to hear —— But how could you celebrate so joyous an event while so great a mystery hangs over the fate of poor Catalina?"

"O Don Ronald! I know not," replied the young lady, confusedly, "What a very strange question to ask!"

"Pardon me, senora!"

"*Santa Maria!* I am not angry with you; but Don Alvaro is so very impetuous, and fearing the chance of war—— But ah! senor, we must bid you adieu if we would reach the city of Elvas before dawn, and 'tis many good leagues from Lobon."

The other ladies, who had become impatient at the delay, now proposed to ride on, and the arrival of the field-officer on duty, to visit the out-picquet, put an end to the conversation. Ronald briefly pointed out to them, to the best of his knowledge, the safest road to Elvas, and the one by which bands of roving guerillas were least likely to be met with; and then hurried off to his post, while the ladies and their escort galloped in the direction of Lobon.

Ronald watched the helmets and spears of the troopers, and the waving feathers of the ladies, as long as they were in sight; and so negligent was he during the inspection of his picquet, that, to use a mess-room phrase, he gained a hearty *rowing* from old Lieutenant-colonel Macdonald, the senior major of his regiment, who was mighty indignant at the absence of mind he displayed, and the general answers he gave to questions asked of him. But it was not to be wondered at: his thoughts were with Catalina, and his bosom was a prey to a greater degree of anxiety and uneasiness than he had felt for a very long time. That Catalina, the proud, the gentle, and the beautiful, should be a captive in the hands of so unscrupulous an enemy as the French, subjected to their insolence, and perhaps barbarity, filled him with thoughts that stung him almost to madness; and, finding it impossible to sleep, although the grass was soft as velvet, and the bright moon was shining gloriously, he remained walking to and fro between the piles of arms until daylight, watching the waning blaze of Badajoz, and listening to the noise of the assault as the night-wind, sweeping over the plain, brought it to his ear. Intently he watched the light; and when, towards morning, the boom of "the *red* artillery" died away, he almost hoped that the assault had failed, and that an order would

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arrive for the second division to advance to support the besiegers, that he might have an opportunity of meeting hand to hand the enemy, against whom he had conceived a peculiar feeling of detestation; or that he might have the desperate honour of leading a forlorn-hope, an affair, by the bye, of which he had as yet but a very slight conception. The din of war, which had lasted the live-long night, ceased at day-break, and the flashes of cannon and musketry were no longer seen on the ramparts of the capital of Estremadura, in the direction of which all eyes were anxiously turned, although it is not distinctly visible from Lobon.

About sunrise a British staff-officer spurred his horse furiously into the encampment. He was covered with dust, and even blood; his plumes were gone, and his whole appearance told of the part he had acted in the dangers of the past night, and the speed with which he had ridden. It was towards Ronald's picquet that he advanced.

"What news from Badajoz?" cried the latter.

"Glorious! glorious!" replied he, evidently in a fierce state of exultation, full of wild excitement and tumult, as one might be supposed to be who had spent such a night of accumulated horrors, while he checked with some difficulty the headlong speed of his jaded charger. "I have not a moment to spare: where are the quarters of General Hill?"

"Our troops have carried the place, then?"

"Again, again, and again the columns were repulsed with frightful slaughter; but again and again the assault was renewed, fighting as we alone can fight. Badajoz is in ruins,—but it is ours; the breaches and ditches are filled with the dead and the dying. Phillipon, retiring to fort San Christoval, surrendered his garrison prisoners of war this morning at daybreak, after doing all that mortal men could do!" A cheer arose from the picquet, who crowded round.

"And our loss—"

"Four thousand killed, wounded, and missing,—rough calculation; that of the enemy five thousand."

"Nine thousand in one night!"

"A strange trade is war, truly! but a night such as the last is an era in a man's lifetime. Sir Rowland's quarters, where are they?"

"The cottage yonder—"

"With the vine-covered chimney and broad eaves?"

"Under the chesnuts."

"Thanks. Fighting is in store for you in the neighbourhood of Truxillo; you will know it all in good time. Adieu."

Dashing his gory rowels into the flanks of his horse, he galloped towards the tented camp. Immediately on his reaching it, a tremendous cheer arose among the soldiers, who came rushing from their tents and cantonments in the village. Infantry chakoes, grenadier caps, and Highland bonnets were tossed into the air,—caught, and tossed up again. The regimental bands played "Rule Britannia," and other national airs; while, amid the shouts, cheers, and rolling of drums, were heard the pipers of the Highland regiments blowing, "There's nae folk like our ain folk," as they paraded to and fro before the quarters of the general, who, to increase the rejoicing, ordered an extra ration of rum to be served out to every man on the occasion by the commissary.

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CHAPTER XXII.

THE FLAG OF TRUCE.

"Yet, be it known, had bugles blown,
Or sign of war been seen,
Those bands, so fair together ranged,
Those hands, so frankly interchanged,
Had dyed with gore the green."

Last Minstrel, canto v.

About a fortnight after this, Sir Rowland Hill reviewed his division of the army near the town of Almendralejo, so often mentioned in preceding chapters. In the evening, a strong detachment, consisting of the first brigade of infantry, part of the second brigade, a body of British cavalry, artillery, and Portuguese caçadores, were selected from the division, and marched an hour before daybreak next morning, pursuing the road to Madrid under the command of the general himself, who left Sir William Erskine in charge of the remainder of the division, which continued in cantonments at Almendralejo.

That some great enterprise was on foot there could be no doubt, from the secrecy maintained by the general as to the object of the march, the solitary places through which their route lay after leaving the Madrid road, and the deserted places, cork-woods, chesnut thickets, &c., in which they concealed their bivouacs at night. Great excitement existed among the troops, and many were the surmises as to what might be the ultimate object of this sudden expedition, until it became known that to force the pass of Miravete, and destroy certain forts erected at the bridge of Almarez on the Tagus, were the intentions of the enterprising leader.

On the evening of the 15th May the troops destined for this particular service entered the city of Truxillo, the place from which Don Balthazzar* takes his title. It is, like most Spanish cities, situated on a rocky eminence, contains about four thousand inhabitants, a handsome Plaza, and several churches. Ronald was billeted on the very house in which the famous conqueror of America, Pizarro, was born, and the mouldered coat-armorial of whose noble family yet appeared over the entrance-door. He had just finished a repast of hashed mutton and garlic,—time had reconciled him to the latter,—and was discussing a few jugs of *Xeres seco* with his host, when the serjeant-major of the Gordon Highlanders, tapping at the door with his cane, warned him to join Captain Stuart's out-picquet as a supernumerary subaltern.

His host, Don Gonzago de Conquesta, a lineal descendant of Pizarro, was detailing the once great honours of his now decayed house when this unwelcome intelligence was brought to Stuart, who, snatching his cloak and sword, vented a malediction on the adjutant, and departed in no pleasant mood, bearing with him a couple of bottles of the *Xeres seco*, which were pressed upon him by Don Gonzago, who said that he never went on duty (he was a *Capitan de Cazadores*) without plenty of liquor. It was a lesson he had learned in his campaigns "under the great General Liniers, at Buenos-Ayres, in 1807." The out-picquet, which Ronald departed to join, was posted near the river Almonte, at

* The condé is still alive. I saw his name mentioned in a French paper some months ago.

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the base of the large mountain, on the summit and sides of which appeared the three divisions of Truxillo,—the castle, the city, and the town, as they are styled. And often, as he hurried down the hill, he looked back at the picturesque Spanish city, with its Gothic spires and belfries, its embattled fortress, lines of frowning ramparts built on masses of rock, and its thousand casements, gleaming like burnished gold in the light of the setting sun.

It was a beautiful evening: the air was cool and balmy,—the sky blue and cloudless, and the clear atmosphere showed vividly the various tints of the extensive landscape, where yellow fields, green thickets, and the windings of the Almonte stretched away far in the distance.

The chain of sentinels were posted along the sedgy banks of the river, and on a green grassy knoll beside it, amid groves where the yellow orange and clustering grape were ripening in the sun, sat Ronald and the officer commanding the picquet, Captain Stuart of the 50th regiment, discussing the flasks of *Xeres seco*. While they were conversing on the probable issue of the intended attack on the castle of Miravete and the French forts at Almarez, a sentry by the river-side passed the word of alarm, that some of the enemy were in motion on the other side of the stream.

Far down the Almonte, advancing over the level ground from the direction of the Madrid road, appeared four figures on foot, and the glitter of polished metal showed that they were armed men.

"Mr. Stuart," said the captain of the picquet, "take with you a file of men and a bugler, and see who these may be. You may cross here,—I suppose the river is fordable. Should you see anything suspicious farther off, let the bugle-boy sound, to warn us."

"This promises to be an adventure," said Ronald, fixing his sword in his belt, and preparing to start. "A flag of truce, probably, sent from the castle of Miravete."

"Most likely: they have come from that direction. Sir Rowland will be ill pleased to think the enemy know of his vicinity. But as these communications are generally only for the purpose of reconnoitering and gaining intelligence, you must be careful to frustrate any such intentions by answering reservedly all questions, and beware that their cunning does not out-flank your caution."

"Fear not: man to man, if they—"

"Nay: should it be a flag of truce, you must receive it with all attention and courtesy; but you had better move off, and meet them as far from here as possible."

"There are two stout fellows of my own company here; I will take them with me. Ewen Macpherson Mackie, unpile your arms, and follow me. Look sharp there, men!"

Accompanied by two sturdy Highlanders, and a bugler of the 50th foot, he crossed the Almonte, which took them up to the waist, and scrambling over the opposite bank, advanced towards the strangers without feeling much discomfort from the wetting,—fording a river being with them a daily occurrence.

Four French soldiers appeared to be coming straight towards them, through the middle of a waving field of yellow corn, treading it down in a remorseless manner, that would have put any bluff English farmer or douce gude-man of the Lothians at his wits' end, had he seen them. It appeared to be a toilsome pathway, as it rose breast-high, and in some places hid them altogether, save the tops of their grenadier caps. On gaining the skirts of the field, they broke their way through the

lofty vine-trellis which covered the road like a long green arbour, and could now be perfectly discerned; and as they neared each other, Ronald felt a degree of excitement and pleasure roused within him, for which it was not difficult to account, this being his first meeting with the enemy in arms.

Two of them were tall French grenadiers in dark great-coats, adorned with large red worsted epaulets, wearing heavy bear-skin caps and hairy knapsacks, and had their bayonets fixed on their long muskets.

In front advanced an officer, wearing the same sort of cap, and the rich uniform of the *old* Guard. A little *tambour*, with his brass drum slung on his back, trotted beside him.

"Halt!" exclaimed Ronald, when they were about four hundred yards off. "With ball-cartridge prime and load."

The performance of this action was seen by the strangers. The little *tambour* beat a long roll on his drum; and the officer, halting his file of grenadiers, displayed a white handkerchief, and advanced alone. Ronald did so likewise, and they met at an equal distance from their respective parties. The officer (whose brown cheek bore witness of service) wore the little gold cross that showed he was a *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur*, and raising his hand to his grenadier-cap in salute, he pulled from the breast of his coat a long sealed despatch.

"*Monsieur officier*," said he, "here is a communication from Marshal Soult to General Sir Rowland Hill, which I have the honour to request you will see forwarded."

Ronald bowed and took the letter, surprised to hear such pure English spoken by a Frenchman; while the latter unslung a metal flask which hung at his waist-belt, to share its contents in friendship.

"*Croix Dieu!*" he exclaimed, starting back with a look of recognition and surprise. "Ah, Monsieur Stuart, *mon ami*, have you forgotten me quite? Do you not remember Victor D'Estouville and the castle of Edinburgh?"

Ronald gazed upon him in astonishment.

"D'Estouville! is this indeed you?"

"I am happy to say it is; who else could it be, monsieur? I was very tired of being a *prisonnier de guerre* in that gloomy bastile in the Scottish capital; but an exchange of prisoners took place soon after you left it, and now I am again a free man, fighting the battles of the Emperor, with the eagle over my brow, and wearing my belted sword. Brave work it is,—but I am as miserable now as I was then."

"Hard fighting and no promotion, perhaps?"

"We have plenty of both in the service of the great Emperor. I am now major in the battalion of *the* Guard."

"Allow me to congratulate you. And—and—what was the lady's name? Diane de Montmichel?"

"*C'est le diable!*" muttered he, while his cheek grew pale as death; but the emotion instantly passed away, and a bold and careless look replaced it.

"D'Estouville, you did not find her faithless, I hope?"

"I found her only *Madame la Colonelle*, as we say in our service."

"The wife of your colonel! How much I regret to hear it. The devil! I think women are all alike perfidious."

"Perfidious indeed, Monsieur Stuart, as many a husband and lover, on his return from captivity, finds to his cost. But I mean to revenge myself on the whole sex, and care no more for the best of them than for the meanest *fille de joie* that ever was horsed through a camp on the

wooden steed. On my return to France, I hastened to the valley of Lillebonne; but it was no longer a paradise to me. My sisters were all married to knaves who cared nothing for me, and a grassy grave in the churchyard was all that remained to me of my dear mother. But *miséricorde! la belle Diane* was no longer there,—she had become the wife of my colonel, the Baron de Clappourknuis, forgetting poor Victor D'Estouville, her first love (that which romancers make such a fuss about); he who had preferred her before all the maidens of the valley of Lillebonne,—and there they are numerous and as beautiful as the roses."

"Learn to forget her, D'Estouville; you may find it—"

"She is forgotten as my love. *Croix Dieu!* nay, more; she is forgiven."

"And she is now Baroness Clappourknuis?"

"*Oui, monsieur*,—such, I suppose, she would rather be, with the boorish old colonel for her husband, than the wife of Victor D'Estouville, a poor *subalterne* as I was then."

"Certes, you have got rapid promotion. And you are really now a major?" said Ronald, feeling a little chagrin. "I am still only an ensign,—sub-lieutenant, I believe you style it."

"*Diable!* your promotion is long of coming, especially in these times, when heads are broken like egg-shells. But I would rather have my peace of mind, than promotion to the baton of a marshal of the empire."

"Then you have not forgotten her, although you so often protest you have?"

"I have forgotten to love her, at least. *Peste!* I am quite cured of that passion. I can regard her, and speak of her with the utmost nonchalance; and, as a proof, I volunteered to bring this letter from the Duke of Dalmatia to your general, relative to procuring the release of the baron, my *chef*, by exchanging him for some British prisoners captured at Villa Garcia, where, by some misadventure, our rear-guard was so severely cut up by your heavy cavalry under Sir Stapleton Cotton. You see, Monsieur Stuart, I am so calmed down in this matter, that I can, even without a pang, negotiate for the restoration of her husband to her arms."

At that moment a bugle from Captain Stuart's post sounded, as if warning Ronald to retire.

"A bugle-call," said D'Estouville; "the officer commanding the out-picquet has lost his patience."

"I must now bid you farewell; we may soon meet again, but in less pleasant circumstances."

"Then you *do* mean to carry Miravete?" said the Frenchman with sudden animation.

"I have not said so," replied Ronald, coldly. "I merely said we might meet—"

"Not unlikely, if your general comes further this way. The forts of Napoleon and Ragusa, covering the bridge of the Tagus at Almarez, and the town of Miravete, defended as they are by the bravest hearts of the old Guard, might bar the passage of Xerxes with his host."

"But surely not against the capturers of Badajoz and Ciudad Rodrigo?" said Ronald, gently, with a smile.

"*Peste! oui.* These were misadventures, and the great Emperor will soon make us amends. There was something wrong in this last affair at Badajoz; yet the soldiers fought well, and Phillipon, their

general, is, as we say, *guerrier sans peur et sans reproche*," replied the Frenchman, while a flush of indignant shame crossed his bronzed cheek, and he twisted up his heavy moustache with an air of military pride and ludicrous confusion.

Again the bugle sounded from the other side of the river, warning them to part. D'Estouville uncorked his flask, and filling up the stopper, which held about a wine-glass, with brandy, presented it to Ronald, and they drank to each other. The two grenadiers of the Guard, their tambour, the two Highlanders, and the young bugler, were now beckoned to advance, and D'Estouville shared the contents of his flask among them, while they shook hands all round heartily, and regarded each other's uniform, accoutrements, and bronzed visages with evident curiosity.

"We have drunk to the health of your General Hill. *C'est un vieux routier*, as we Frenchmen say," observed D'Estouville, replacing his empty flask. "As for your leader, Monsieur Wellington, I cannot say I admire him: he is not the man to gain the love of the soldier. No medals,—no ribands,—no praise in the grand bulletin,—no crosses like *this* won under his command. *Vive l'Empereur!* The great Napoleon is the man for these,—the man for a soldier to live and die under. But I must bid you farewell—without returning what you so kindly lent me in the castle of Edinburgh."

"I beg you will not mention it."

"There is little use in doing so, all the gold I have being on my shoulders. *Nom d'un pape!* never will I forget your kindness. But I hope your general has no intention of beating up our quarters at Almarez?"

"I have not heard that such *is* his intention," said Ronald, colouring at the equivocal nature of his reply.

"We are very comfortable there at present; quite country quarters, in fact."

"How! are you stationed there?"

"I am commandant of the forts of the bridge. A wing of my own battalion of the Guard form part of the garrison. But we must part now, monsieur. How dark the evening has become! Almarez is a long way off among the mountains, and we shall barely reach it by to-morrow. I am anxious to return and console a certain lady there, who has, I suppose, been pining very much in my absence."

"Indeed! 'Tis no wonder, then, that Diane de Montmichel is so easily forgotten."

"*Peste!* I am executing but a part of my grand plot of vengeance against the sex," replied the other gaily. "I am a droll fellow, monsieur, but quite the one for a soldier. The young creature is superbly beautiful. I captured her at a town near this a few weeks ago, and carried her to Almarez, to enliven my quarters there. But *diable!* she is ever drooping like a broken lily, weeping, and upbraiding me in Spanish; but I must make a bold effort, when I return, to carry her heart by escalade. I have half won the outworks already, I believe. *Soldats!*" cried he, turning quickly round, "*portez vos armes; demi-tour à droite,—marche!*"

He touched his cap and went off with his party, saying, in a loud and laughing tone, "Adieu, *mon ami;* when I return to Almarez, I shall speak of you to *la belle Cataline*."

Ronald, who had listened to his last observations with some emotion, started at the name he mentioned, and would have recalled him; but

a long, loud, and angry bugle-blast from the out-picquet compelled him to retire and recross the Almonte, but he cast many an anxious glance after the dark and lessening figures of D'Estouville and his soldiers, as they toiled their way through the field of tall corn.

The evening had now given place to the night, the last trace of day had faded from the mountainous ridge of the Lina, and the waning moon was shining coldly and palely above the spires and castle of Truxillo.

"Mr. Stuart," said one of the soldiers, as they marched along under the dark shadows of the thick and gloomy vine-trellis, "if I micht daur to advise, it wadna be amiss to ask that chield with the sark owre his claes, what he means by followin' us aboot, as he has dune, glintin' and glidin' here and there in the gloaming."

"Who—where, Macpherson?"

"Under the vine-trees, on your richt hand, sir."

Ronald now perceived, for the first time, a priest in a light grey cassock or gown, which enveloped his whole body, keeping pace with them—taking step for step, at a short distance.

"He has been close beside ye, sir," continued the soldier, "the haill time ye were speaking to the Frenchman,—listening and glowering wi' een like a gosshawk, although he aye keepit himsel sae close amang the leaves o' the bushes, that you couldna see him as we did."

"Do you really say so? What can the fellow's object be? By the colour of his robe, he looks like one of the Franciscans of Merida," said Ronald, considerably interested while he watched the priest narrowly, and saw that he was evidently moving in time with them, but keeping himself concealed as much as possible among the poles of the trellis-work, and the vines which were twisted around them.

"Holloa, Senor Padre, holloa!" cried Stuart. But no sooner did he speak, than the mysterious padre glided away, and, as any monk of romance would have done, disappeared, and no further trace could they find of him at that time. Many were the surmises of the soldiers about the matter, and Ewen Macpherson, a Gael from Loch Oich, gave decidedly his opinion that "it was something no cannie." But the affair passed immediately from the mind of Ronald, whose thoughts were absorbed in the idea that Donna Catalina was a prisoner in the hands of the French. It roused a thousand stirring and harrowing emotions within him; and forgetting that he was observed, he often muttered to himself, and grasped his sword with energy, as they hurried along.

Fording the Almonte again, they clambered up the bank, and on gaining the grassy knoll, Ronald presented Soult's letter to Captain Stuart, from whom he endured a very disagreeable cross-questioning as to what his long conversation with the Frenchman had been about. He found his sentiments of regard for D'Estouville very much lessened when he appeared in the new character of a rival, and eagerly he longed for the assault on Almarez, that he might have an opportunity of distinguishing himself, and, if possible, freeing Catalina at the point of the sword. Often he repented not having followed D'Estouville at all risks, and commanded him, on his honour, to treat the lady with the respect which was due to her rank and sex.

It was a clear moonlight night, and he lay awake on the grassy sod, musing on these matters, and thinking of Alice Lisle and the relation in which he stood to her. Old Stuart, the captain of the picquet, after having drained the last drop of the *Xeres seco*, had wrapped himself

up in his cloak, and went to sleep under a bush, with a stone for a pillow. From his reverie Ronald was aroused by seeing, close by, the same figure of the monk in the grey tunic, evidently watching him, and with no common degree of interest, as his eyes seemed to sparkle under the laps of his cowl, in a manner which gave him a peculiar and rather uncomfortable aspect.

"Ho! the picquet there!" cried Stuart, springing to his feet, and making a plunge among the orange foliage where the figure had appeared. "Holloa, sentry! seize that fellow! Confound it, he has escaped!" he added, as the appearance vanished again, without leaving a trace behind.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALMAREZ.

"Hark! through the silence of the cold, dull night,
The hum of armies gathering rank on rank!
Lo! dusky masses, steal in dubious light,
Along the 'leagured wall and bristling bank
Of the armed river ——" *Don Juan*, canto vii.

It was Sir Rowland Hill's intention, in order to keep his movements concealed from the enemy, to march his troops in the night, and halt them before dawn in the wood of Jarciejo, situate about half way between Almarez and Truxillo.

On the night of the intended departure from the latter place, Ronald sat late with the worthy descendant of Pizarro, Captain Don Gonzago, listening to his long stories about that "famous and noble cavalier General Liniers, and the campaigns of Buenos Ayres," until the shrill bugles at the hour of midnight sounded "the *assembly*" through the echoing streets of the city. In ten minutes the whole of the troops destined to force the strong places of the French were under arms, and the snapping of flints, the ringing of steel ramrods, the tramp of cavalry and clash of artillery guns, travelling *caissons* and clattering tumbrils carrying the tools of sappers, miners, pioneers, &c., gave token of the coming strife.

Many a flickering light from opened casements streamed into the dark street on the bronzed visages and serried files of the passing troops, whom they greeted with many a viva! or hurrah!

Departing from the ancient house of Pizarro, Ronald hurried through the dark and strange streets towards the muster-place, and twice on his way thither was his path crossed by the priest mentioned in my last chapter; but the pale outline of his figure eluded his search,—the first time by disappearing under the black piazzas of the town-house, and the second time in the deep gloomy shadow of the cloisters of San Jago de Compostella; and although Ronald eagerly longed to follow him, so much was he pressed for time, that he found it impossible to do so.

Without the sound of drum or horn, they began their midnight march, descending from Truxillo towards the Almonte,—the soldiers carrying with them, in addition to their heavy accoutrements, axes, sledge-hammers, and iron levers, to beat down stockades and gates, and scaling-ladders to aid the assault; which cumbersome implements they bore forward by turns during the dreary night-march.

Oh, the indescribable annoyances and weariness of such a march!

To feel oneself overpowered with sleep, and yet be compelled to trudge on through long and unknown routes and tracts of country—seeing with heavy and half-closed eyes the road passing by like a running stream, no sound breaking the monotonous tread of the marching feet—to drop asleep for a moment, and be unpleasantly aroused by your nodding head coming in contact with the knapsack of a front file—to trudge on, on, on, while every limb and fibre is overcome with lassitude, and having the comfortable assurance that many will be knocked on the head before daybreak, while your friends at home are lying snugly in bed, not knowing or caring a jot about the matter.

Before dawn the detachments were secreted and bivouacked in the wood of Jarciajo, where they remained the whole day, keeping close within its recesses, as they were now in the immediate neighbourhood of the enemy, upon whose strongholds a night-attack was determined to be made. Before morning broke, Ronald had an opportunity of bringing to a parley the monk, who appeared to dog him in so mysterious and sinister a manner.

Standing under the dark shade of a large chesnut, as if for concealment, he suddenly espied the glimmer of his long and floating grey cassock. The young Highlander agilely sprung forward, and caught him by the cope, when, as usual, he was about to fly.

"Well, reverend padre, I have caught you at last! How now, senor?"

"What mean you, caballero?" asked the priest gruffly, turning boldly upon him.

"Priest! I demand of you," replied the other angrily, "your intentions? Your following me about thus cannot be for good: answer me at once, if you dare! I will drag you to the quarter-guard, and have you unfrocked—by Heaven, I will, if you answer me not instantly."

"*Hombre*, I understand you not," said the priest insolently. "Unhand my cope, *senor officiale*, or, *demonio!* I have a dagger—"

"A dagger! How, you rascally padre! dare you threaten me?"

"Why not, if you grasp me thus?" answered he in a tone, the deepness and ferocity of which caused Ronald to start. "Unhand me, senor cavalier, or it may be the worse for you in the end. I am a holy priest of *el Consento de todos Santos*, at Merida, and bear a letter from the corregidor to Sir Rowland Hill, who has employed me as his guide."

"I believe you not; you are no priest, but some cursed spy of Soult's, and if so, shall hang before sunrise. Draw back his cowl!" said Stuart to the soldiers, who thronged round.

"*Santos-Santissimus! O Madre de Dios!*" cried the other, evidently in tribulation, "touch it not, lest ye commit a grievous sin. I am under a vow, which ye comprehend not. Unhand me, noble cavalier! I am but a poor priest, and may not contend with armed soldiers."

The gruff voice of the priest died away in a whining tone; and at this crisis, up came the brigade-major, saying that Sir Rowland wished to speak with the guide, adding that he was astonished to find an officer brawling with a monk, and expounded, for Ronald's benefit, the whole of the prosy passages in general orders relating to "guides," "conciliation of the Spaniards," &c. &c., all of which he had at his tongue's end, to use an inelegant phrase.

The priest broke away, and followed him through the wood, bestowing as he departed a hearty malediction on Ronald as a sacrilegious

heretic, who, although he valued it not a rush, was surprised at such an ebullition of wrath from a friar—a character in Spain generally so meek, humble, and conciliating.

The dagger, too! The mention of it had aroused all his suspicion, and he resolved to watch the reverend father more narrowly in future; and yet General Hill must have been well assured of his honour and veracity, before he would trust to his guidance on so important an occasion as the present.

Arrangements having been made for a night attack upon the enemy, the troops were again under arms at dusk, mustered and called together from the dingles of the wood, as noiselessly as possible by voices of orderlies, and not by note of bugle or bagpipe. Formed in three columns, they quitted the forest of Jarciejo, and followed the route pointed out by their guide.

Another long and weary night-march was before them,—a night that might have no morning for some of them; but they entertained not such dismal reflections, and remembered only a high spirit of emulation, which the recent captures of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz called forth. The night was intensely dark, not a star lit the vast black dome of heaven, and each column, guided by a Spaniard who knew the country well, set out upon its separate march. The first, composed of the gallant 28th (familiarly known as the *slashers*) and 34th regiments, with a battalion of Portuguese caçadores, under the orders of General Chowne, were directed to take by storm the tower of Miravete,—a fortress crowning the summit of a rugged hill, rising on one side of the mountain pass to which it gave its name, and through which the road to Madrid lies.

The second column, commanded by General Long, was directed to storm the works erected by the garrison of Miravete across the pass, which consisted of a strong gate, with breast-work and palisadoes, loop-holed for musketry, and defended by cannon.

General Howard's, or the first brigade, formed the third column, composed of the 50th regiment, the 71st Highland Light Infantry, and the Gordon Highlanders, together with some artillery. These marched by the mountains; the priest acting as their guide to the forts at the bridge of Almarez, which they were ordered to "take at the point of the bayonet." Sir Rowland Hill accompanied them, riding beside the grey padre, who had been accommodated with a mule, with a dozen bells jangling at its bridle.

The night, as I have already said, was intensely dark; a general blackness enveloped the whole surrounding scenery, and the summits of the gloomy mountains among which they marched could scarcely be discerned from the starless sky that closed behind them like a vast sable curtain. Many hours more than the general had ever calculated upon were spent on the way, and numerous suspicions of the guide's knowledge or veracity were entertained; yet to all questions he replied with some monkish benediction, muttered in a snuffling tone, and insisted that the route he led them was the nearest to the village of Almarez.

But many a malediction did the heavily-armed soldiers bestow on their monkish guide, and the desolate and toilsome way he led them. Struggling through dark defiles and narrow gorges, encumbered with fallen trees and rugged masses of rock, twisted brushwood and thickets, every one of which might, for aught they knew, contain a thousand riflemen in ambush,—through toilsome and slippery channels of rushing streams,—over immense tracts of barren mountainous waste, they

were led during the whole of that night, the priest's grey cope and cassock waving in the gloom as he rode at the head of the column, appearing like the *ignis-fatuus*, which led them about until, at last, when morning was drawing near, the column halted in the midst of a deep swamp, which took some ankle deep, and others above their leggins or gartered hose, in water,—the reverend padre declaring, by the sanctity of every saint in the calendar, he knew not whereabouts they were. A scarce-smothered malison broke out from front to rear, and the soldiers stamped their feet in the water from pure vexation. Close column was now formed on the 50th regiment, and Sir Rowland questioned the padre in so angry a tone, that the whole brigade heard him.

"Hold the bridle of his mule, and cut him down should he attempt to fly," said he to his orderly dragoon. "And now, *senor padre*, answer me directly, and attempt not to prevaricate; for by Heaven if you do, you will find your cassock no protection from the halberts or a musket-shot,—one or other you shall feel without ceremony."

"Noble caballero," urged the padre.

"Silence! This night you have played the traitor to Ferdinand, to Spain, and to us. Is it not so?"

"No, senor general," replied the other stoutly.

"Through your instrumentality, the attack on Almarez has failed."

"*Ira se en humo!*"* replied the priest, doggedly.

"Do you mock us, rascal?"

"No, cavalier; but no true Spaniard likes to be questioned thus imperiously."

"You speak somewhat boldly for a priest. But daylight is already breaking, and we must retire into concealment, or abandon the attempt altogether. Point out some track by which we may retreat, or, priest and Spaniard as you are, I will order a drum-head court-martial, and have you shot as a traitor and spy, or leaguer with the enemy."

"*Gracios excellenze!*" urged the padre.

"Your entreaties are of no avail. You have deceived us, with the usual treachery of your nation, false monk!"

"By *San Juan*, I have not, general! The robe I wear, and the letter of the corregidor of Merida, sufficiently attest my veracity. I have erred through ignorance, not intention."

"I pray it may be so," said Sir Rowland, in a kinder tone. "God forbid I should wrong an honest man! But where lies the village of Almarez—"

At that moment the flash of a cannon a long way down the mountains, among whose shattered peaks the report was reverberated, answered the question.

By the time which elapsed between the sight of the flash and the sound of the report, it seemed to be fired about a mile distant. "The morning gun,—that is Almarez," muttered the soldiers.

"*Caballeros y soldados!*" cried the priest with sudden energy, "I have been no traitor, as you seem to suppose me. In truth I knew not the road,—by San Jago de Compostella, I did not! To-morrow night, without fail, I will guide you to the gates of Almarez. I tell you this as truly as that every maravedi of my reward shall go to the shrine of my good Lady of Majorga, whom some rogues have lately plundered of her robes."

"Unhand his bridle," said Sir Rowland; "I must believe him. Major, what think you?"

* It will end in smoke,—a Spanish saying.

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"There is no alternative," replied the major of brigade; "but as the regulations say, 'Guides cannot be too jealously watched;' and, again, in page—"

"'Tis a waste of time to expound the regulations to a man whose knowledge is confined to his bible and mass-book," replied the general with a smile. "We will retire up the mountains, and lie concealed till favoured again by the darkness. Let the column break into sections, and move off left in front. Colonel Cameron, your Highlanders will lead the way."

A solitary place of concealment was gained among the rugged mountains of the Lina, where the bivouac was hidden from the sentinels on the castle of Miravete.

The officers anxious to lead that most desperate, but gallant, of all military enterprises, the *forlorn hope* in the intended assault, were requested to send their names to the general. In spite of all that Macdonald and his more cautious friends could say to dissuade Ronald from so heedlessly exposing himself to danger, the fiery young Highlandman offered to lead the storming-party. He well knew how great was the danger, and how little the chance of escape attending those who headed the forlorn band; but he was animated by no ordinary feelings, and spurred on by the most powerful of all human passions,—love and ambition. With these inspiring his soul, what is it that a brave man feels himself unequal to encounter and overcome? Ronald was also eager to distinguish himself, to gain the favour of the general, the applause of the troops, the freedom of Catalina, and the admiration—alas! he could no longer look for the love—of Alice Lisle.

The brigade-major informed him (not forgetting to add a stave of the regulations thereto) that his namesake, Captain Stuart, of the 50th regiment, had likewise sent his name as a candidate for the desperate honour, and had been, of course, accepted, in consequence of his superior rank, adding that Sir Rowland would not forget Mr. Stuart in the next affair of the same kind, and that on the present occasion he might, if he chose, attend the storming-party as a supernumerary, as it was very likely the first fire would knock its leader on the head. With this Ronald was obliged to be contented,—rather chagrined, however, to find that he had exposed himself to the same danger, without a chance of obtaining the same honour.

During that day the ground was carefully examined and reconnoitred. The rugged bed of a dried-up stream, which led from the summits of the Lina to the Tagus at Almarez, was chosen as the surest line of route on the next occasion.

Almarez was a miserable little Spanish village, consisting of two rows of huts or cottages, leading to an ancient bridge, which had been recently blown up, but the want of which the French supplied by a strong pontoon, extending between their forts on each side of the river, —the one named Ragusa, and the other Napoleon. The latter *tête-du-pont* was strongly intrenched, and defended by nine pieces of heavy cannon and five hundred men: Ragusa was a regular work, defended by an equal number of men and iron guns. A large square tower, rising in the midst like a keep, added greatly to the strength of the place.

After remaining for three days bivouacked among the solitary mountains of the Lina (a ridge or sierra which runs parallel with the Tagus), about ten o'clock on the evening of the last the third column got under arms, and making a circuit among the hills under guidance of the

priest, to avoid Miravete, arrived at the bed of the stream, which, in the darkness, was their surest guide to Almarez. But before reaching this place, either by the ignorance or treachery of their guide, they were again led astray, and spent another night marching about in the darkness and solitude of these dreary sierras. It was close on dawn of day before they gained the village of Almarez at the base of the hills, by descending the rough channel of the rill, a long and toilsome path, admitting but one file abreast, as the rocks rose abruptly on each side of it, and the passage was encumbered by large stones, projecting roots and trunks of fallen trees, which caused many of the soldiers to be hurt severely, by falling in the dark as they toiled on, bearing, in addition to their arms, the scaling-ladders, the hammers, levers, and other implements for the assault on the gates of the *tête-du-pont*.

The intention of taking Almarez by surprise was frustrated by the garrison in the castle of Miravete. General Chowne's column having made an assault on the outworks of the place, its soldiers, to alarm the forts at the bridge, sent off scores of rockets in fiery circles through the inky-black sky; beacons of tar-barrels blazed on every turret, and red signal-lights glared in every embrasure of the embattled tower, purpling the sky above and the valley below, flaring on the hideous rents, yawning chasms, and precipitous fronts of the huge basaltic rocks among which it is situated, and some of which, covered with foliage, overhang the dark blue waters of the Tagus. In some places the basaltic crags reared their fronts to the height of several hundred feet above the straggling route of the third column. The scene was wild, splendid, picturesque, and impressively grand, such as few men have looked on,—the dark sky, the tremendous scenery, and the tower blazing with its various lights and fires, while the peals of musketry from the assailants and the assailed reverberated among the hills, the outlines of which were now distinctly visible,—their sides dotted here and there by flocks of Merino sheep, goats, &c., which had escaped the forage-parties of the enemy.

General Hill was now perfectly aware that an attempt to carry the forts by surprise was frustrated, as the assault upon them all should have commenced at once; yet, relying on the mettle and chivalry of his gallant troops, worn out as they were by their night-marches, he did not hesitate to make the effort, although he knew that the garrisons of the *têtes-du-pont* would be under arms for his reception. Within an hour of daybreak the three regiments had quitted their path, and formed in order at some little distance from the scene of intended operations.

All was still and dark. Before them lay the quiet little village of Almarez, with its orange-trees and vineyards, and with its ruined bridge, the broad abutments and piers of the centre arch of which hang over the Tagus, whose deep dark waters swept sluggishly on, rippling against the jarring and heaving boats of the pontoon bridge which the foe had thrown across the river a little lower down, and at each end of which appeared the rising mounds, crowned—the nearest by Fort Napoleon, and that on the other side by the extended trenches and lofty tower of Ragusa.

All was singularly and ominously still within the forts: none appeared stirring except the sentries, whose figures against the sky were discerned moving to and fro on the bastions, or standing still to watch the lights of Miravete, which were yet blazing afar off among the dark mountains of the sierra.

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Preparations were now made for the attack. The colours were uncased and thrown upon the breeze; the flints and primings were examined. The 6th regiment of the Portuguese line, and two companies of German riflemen under Captain Blacier, were ordered to form the *corps-de-réserve*, and moved behind a rising ground, which would cover them from the enemy's fire; while the three British regiments, formed in two columns, pressed forward pell-mell upon the *têtes-du-pont*. Now indeed was the moment of excitement, and the pulsation of every heart became quicker. But the soldiers placed the utmost reliance upon the skill and gallantry of their leader and colonels. At the head of the 50th regiment was Stuart, a man whose perfect coolness and apathy in the hottest actions surprised all, and formed a strong contrast to the enthusiastic spirit of galant Cadogan of the Highland Light Infantry, and to the proud sentiments of chivalry, martial fire, and reckless valour which animated Cameron of Fassifern.

CHAPTER XXIV.

D'ESTOUVILLE.

> "I have seen thee work up glacis and cavalier
> Steeper than this ascent, when cannon, culverin,
> Musquet, and hackbut shower'd their shot upon thee,
> And formed, with ceaseless blaze, a fiery garland
> Round the defences of the post you stormed."
>
> *The Ayrshire Tragedy*, Act I.

THE storming-party, with their broad scaling-ladders, passed forward double-quick to the front.

"Heaven guide you, Ronald!" whispered Louis Lisle hurriedly, pressing the hand of Stuart as he passed the flank of his company.

"God bless you, Lisle! 'tis the last time we may look on each other's faces," replied the other, his heart swelling with sudden emotions of tenderness at this unexpected display of friendship, at such a time, and from one to whom he had long been as a stranger.

"*Maniez le drapeau! Vive l'Empereur! Apprêtez vos armes! Joue—feu!*" cried the clear voice of D'Estouville from the fort; and instantly a volley of musketry broke over the dark line of breastworks, flashing like a continued garland of fire, showing the bronzed visages and tall grenadier caps of the old French Guard, while the waving tricolour, like a banner of crape in the dark, was run up the flag-staff.

"*Vive l'Empereur! Cannoniers, commencez le feu!*" cried a hoarse voice from the angle of the epaule, and the roar of nine twenty-four pounders shook the Tagus in its bed, while crash came their volley of grape and canister like an iron tempest, sweeping one half of the storming-party into eternity, and strewing fragments of limbs, fire-locks, and ladders in every direction. A roar of musketry from the British, and many a soul-stirring cheer, were the replies, and onward pressed the assailants, exposed to a tremendous fire of small-arms from the bulwarks, and grape and cannon-shot from the flanking bastions of the *tête-du-pont*, which mowed them down as a blast mows withered reeds.

When now, for the first time, the sharp hiss of cannon-shot, the groans of dying, and the shrieks of wounded men, rang in his ears, it

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must be owned that Ronald Stuart experienced that peculiar sensation of thick and tumultuous beating in his heart, boundless and terrible curiosity, intense and thrilling excitement, which even the most brave and dauntless must feel when *first* exposed to the dangers of mortal strife. But almost instantly these emotions vanished, and his old dashing spirit of reckless daring and fiery valour possessed him. Captain Stuart had fallen dead at his feet without a groan—shot through the head and heart by the first fire from the epaule—and Ronald, sword in hand, now led on the stormers.

"Follow me, gallants! and we will show them what the first brigade can do," cried he, leaping into the *avant-fosse*. A wild hurrah was his reply; and the soldiers rushed after him, crossing the ditch, and planting their ladders against the stone face of the sloping glacis, exposed to a deadly fire from loop-hole, parapet, and embrasure, while the French kept shouting their war-cry of "Long live the Emperor!" and the voice of D'Estouville was heard above the din, urging them to keep up a rapid fire.

"*Soldats—joue! Chargez vos armes—joue! Vivat!*" echoed always by the hoarse voice of the artillery-officer from the bastion.

"Steady the ladder, Evan Bean Iverach," cried Stuart. "Keep close by me, and show yourself your father's son. God aid our steel! Follow me, soldiers—forward! Hurrah!" With his sword in his right hand, his bonnet in his left, and his dark hair waving about his face, he ascended the ladder fearlessly, and striking up the bayonets which bristled over the parapet, leaped upon it, brandished his sword, miraculously escaping the shower of shot which hailed around him. With dauntless bravery, he sprang from the parapet among them, and instantly the French gave way before the irresistible stream of British troops who poured in upon them, and a desperate struggle took place—short, bloody, but decisive.

"*Ah, mon Dieu! Rallie—rallie! soldats! Diable! Croisez la baionette!*" shouted D'Estouville, frantically,—setting his men the example, by throwing himself headlong on the bayonets of the assailants; but he was driven back, and his efforts were in vain; a score of ladders had been placed against the glacis at other places, and the works were stormed on almost every part at once. The defenders were driven back, but fighting with true French bravery for every inch of ground. The British assailed them with irresistible impetuosity, bearing them backwards with the charged bayonet, the clubbed musket, the pike, and the sword. By the particular favour of Providence, Ronald escaped the dangers of the forlorn hope, while the soldiers who composed his band were mown down like leaves in autumn; but while pressing forward among the enemy, two powerful grenadiers of *les Gardes Français* rushed upon him with their levelled bayonets, putting him in imminent peril. The pike of a sergeant of the 50th freed him of one assailant, and, closing with the other, he dashed his head against the breech of a carronade, and passed his sword through the broad breast of a third, who came up to his rescue, and the warm blood poured over the hand and blade of his conqueror, who now could scarcely keep his feet on the wooden platform surrounding the inner side of the breastwork, which was covered with blood and brains, and piled with dead and wounded—with drums, dismounted cannon, and broken weapons. The scene which was now presented is far beyond my humble powers of description. The blaze of cannon and musketry from Ragusa, at the other end of the pontoon bridge—where the garrison fired at the risk of kill-

ing their comrades—glared on the glassy bosom of the Tagus, tinging it with that red and golden colour so freely bestowed upon it by poets. But within the inner *talus* of the breastwork and bloody platform, the scene would have produced horror in one less excited than men contending hand to hand, and who regarded honour rather than life.

There lay the ghastly dead, cold and pale in the grey light of the morning—across them in heaps, the wounded, quivering with intensity of agony, grasping the gory ground with convulsive clutches, and tearing up the earth, which was soon to cover them, in handfuls, while their eyes, starting from the sockets, were becoming glazed and terrible in death. Others, who had received wounds in less vital parts of the frame, were endeavouring to drag themselves from the press, or stanch their streaming blood, imploring those who neither heard nor heeded them for "Water! water for the love of God!" Yells of sudden agony, the deep groan of the severely wounded, and hoarse death-rattle of the dying men, mingled and were lost in the tumultuous shouts of the French, the steady and hearty cheers of the British, the clash of steel, the tramp of feet and discharge of musketry, the notes of the wild war-pipes of the 71st and 92nd, which were blown loud enough to awaken the heroes of Selma in their tombs. Many acts of personal heroism were performed on both sides before the enemy were fairly driven from their works, for which they fought with the characteristic bravery of their gallant nation.

But longer contention would have been madness. The right wing of the Highland Light Infantry, and the whole of the 50th regiment, poured in upon them like a flood: the whole place was captured in the course of *fifteen minutes*, and its garrison driven into the little square formed by their barracks, and into the bastion from which their imperial tri-colour flung its folds over the conflict.

"On! Forward! Capture the colours before they are destroyed!" was now the cry; and hundreds, following Colonel Stuart of the 50th, pressed forward into the bastion, across the demi-gorge of which the enemy had cast bundles of fascines, composed of billets of wood, baskets of earth, &c., over which they presented their bayonets, and kept up a rapid fire.

Still eager to distinguish himself, Ronald pressed on by the side of the colonel of the 50th, and while endeavouring to break the hedge of steel formed by the enemy's bayonets, he was thrust in among them and borne to the ground, and his campaigns would probably have ended there, had not Evan Iverach, at the peril of his life, plunged over the fascines after him, and borne to the earth a French officer, whose sabre was descending on his master's head.

The athletic Highlander pinned the Gaul to the earth, and unsheathing a *skene-dhu* (black knife), drove it through the breast of his discomfited foe.

"*Nombril de Belzebub! Les sauvages Ecossais! Sacre bleu! Camarades, sauvez-moi!*"—but his comrades had barely time to save themselves from the tide of armed men, who poured through the gap which Evan and his master had formed.

"Hurrah, Highlanders!" cried the stentorian voice of Campbell from another part of the works, where he appeared on foot at the head of his company (he was major by brevet) armed with a long Highland dirk in addition to his formidable Andrea Ferrara. "Hurrah; brave hearts! Give them Egypt over again! Mount the platform, lads! sluc round the cannon, and blow their skulls off!" A hundred active

Highlanders obeyed the order. The twenty-four pounders were reversed, loaded, pointed, and fired in a twinkling, sending a tremendous volley of grape-shot among the dense mass which crowded the dark square, from which arose a yell such as might come from the regions of the damned, mingled with the gallant cry of "*Vive l'Empereur!*"

"Well done, brave fellows! Load and fire again! there's plenty of grape! Another dose! Give it them!—hurra!" cried the inexorable Campbell again. The effects of the second volley were indeed appalling, as, from the elevation of the platform, the shot actually blew off the skulls of the unfortunate French in scores. This was the decisive stroke. The bastion and square were alike abandoned, and all rushed towards the Tagus, to cross and gain the tower of Ragusa; but the garrison of that place, on finding that Fort Napoleon was captured and its guns turned on them by the German artillery, to ensure their own retreat, destroyed that of their comrades, by cutting the pontoon bridge. D'Estouville's troops had now no alternative but to surrender themselves prisoners of war.

So enthusiastic were the soldiers while flushed with excitement and victory, that, following the bold example of Evan Bean, numbers swam the Tagus, and from the other side fired after the fugitive garrison of Ragusa.

"Surrender, noble D'Estouville! Resistance is unavailing," cried Ronald to his old acquaintance, who with his back against the colour-staff, surrounded by corpses and scattered fascines, stood on his guard, with his proud dark eyes flashing fire under his grenadier cap. He was resolute apparently to die, but never to surrender to force.

"Halt! keep back, soldiers!" said Stuart, striking down a ridge of threatening pikes and bayonets. "He will surrender to me. Yield, gallant D'Estouville! you may now do so without a shadow of dishonour."

But he seemed to have forgotten the speaker, as he only replied by a blow and a thrust.

"He is a gallant fellow! said Fassifern, tossing the bridle of his horse to an orderly, and making his way through the press. Save him, if possible, Stuart. *Monsieur, rends votre épée, vos armes.*"

"*Monsieur*, permit me to retain my sword, and I will surrender; 'tis but *le droit de la guerre.*"

"Certainly, sir, if it is your wish."

"*Croix Dieu!* Cursed fortune! So soon again to be a captive! Surely I was born under some evil star!"

"*Monsieur*," replied Cameron, "you have behaved most nobly in this affair. The glory of the vanquished is scarcely less than that of the victors." The Frenchman was subdued by the well-timed flattery, and laying his hand upon his breast, answered by a bow.

"*Mon ami*, to you I render myself. *C'est un aimable roué*," said D'Estouville, laying his hand familiarly on Ronald's epaulet while sheathing his sword; "I become a prisoner without shame. The great Emperor might yield himself without dishonour to you, my old friend; and in truth I would rather surrender to a descendant of the ancient friends of France than to your southern neighbours, for with them a sea of blood will never quench our enmity. *Croix Dieu!* what is this? The base cowards in Ragusa have cut off the retreat of my soldiers! Ah! false Monsieur de Mesmai, the Emperor shall hear of this. *Diable!*"

A proud and peculiar smile shot over his features as the soldiers

pulled down the tri-colour, and bore it off as a trophy from the bastion. He folded his arms, and leaning against the flag-staff, surveyed the ebbing conflict apparently with the utmost coolness and perfect nonchalance; but the quivering of his moustached lip showed the workings of his heart, though he endeavoured to conceal them.

With many a cry of "*Faites bonne guerre, messieurs les Ecossais! Quartier—quartier! Les lois de la guerre, messieurs!*" the discomfited enemy clamorously demanded to be taken as prisoners of war, as the firing had now ceased everywhere; and they often called aloud on "*les Ecossais,*" probably from seeing that the majority of their conquerors wore the kilt and trews of tartan.

"*Soldats, vos armes à terre!*" cried the crest-fallen D'Estouville over the parapet of the bastion; and, as one man, the shattered remains of the gallant garrison grounded their arms, while a strong party of the Gordon Highlanders, with fixed bayonets, surrounded them as a guard.

CHAPTER XXV.

CATALINA.

"I proclaim,
Through all the silent streets Creüsa's name:
Creüsa still I call: at length she hears,
And sudden through the shades of night appears."

Æneis, book 2.

It was now clear daylight, and over heaps of dead and wounded which were stretched around, lying across each other, as Evan said, "like herrins in a keg," Ronald went in search of Catalina through the buildings composing the barracks, which were arranged in the form of a square. At every turn his passage was encumbered by the miserable victims of the morning's carnage, mostly French, as the majority of the British killed and wounded fell in the *avant-fosse*. Here lay the war-worn and grey-haired grenadier of the Guard, seamed with the scars of Austerlitz and Jena, blowing the bells of froth and blood from his quivering lip, and scowling defiance with his glazing eye at the passer. Beside or across him lay the muscular Highlander, his bare legs drenched in gore, casting looks of imploring helplessness, craving "Maister Stuart, for the love o' the heevin aboon them, to bring the wee'st drop of water, or send some ane to stanch their bluid." Here lay one Frenchman with his skull shot away and brains scattered about,—another cut in two by a round shot, and scores, otherwise torn to pieces by Campbell's terrible volley from the platform, lying in long lines, which marked the lane made by the course and radius of each discharge of grape, and the whole place swam with blood and brains—a horrible puddle, like the floor of a slaughter-house.

All this was as nothing to witnessing the frightful agonies of the wretched wounded and dying, goaded with the most excruciating pain, choking in their blood,—their limbs quivering in extremity of torture, while they shrieked the eternal cry of "water!" and shrieked in vain. Ronald pressed forward almost without heeding them,—war for a time sears and hardens the heart in no common degree, even against the utmost accumulation of human wretchedness; but he certainly was rather appalled at the appearance of a soldier of the 50th foot, who had crawled away into a corner to die unseen. A musket-shot had passed

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through his neck, in its way injuring the root of the tongue, which was hanging from his mouth, swollen, livid, and blue, like that of a cow, presenting a hideous and disgusting sight, from which young Stuart, although his fiery heart was beating with the tumult of the late fray, and his red blade dripped with the signs of it, turned away in horror. Little know our peaceful and plodding citizens at home of the miseries of war!

In search of Donna Catalina, Ronald wandered everywhere through the deserted and confused quarters of the enemy, but she was nowhere to be found; and he was about to cross the river and search the tower of Ragusa, or question D'Estouville, when drums beating in the square called him to the parade of the regiment.

It was now a beautiful morning, and the rising sun shed its lustre on the ridges of the Lina and windings of the bright Tagus. At their base, in the pure bosom of the glassy river, the trees and vineyards, cottages and ruined bridge of Almarez, the bastions of Fort Napoleon and black tower of Ragusa, were reflected downwards as clearly as if in some huge mirror. Above them the morning mist from the cork-woods, and the smoke of fire-arms from the forts, mingling together and ascending in volumes, melted away on the thin breezy air. Long and loud blew pipe and bugle, mustering the troops in the square of the *tête-du-pont;* but many who had marched to them merrily yesterday, lay stark and stiff now, and heard their blast no more. The military store-houses of the enemy had been broken open and given over to pillage, and skins of wine, bottles of rum, and kegs of French brandy, were to be had for the broaching. Barrels were staved, and hams, rounds of beef, &c., were tossed by the soldiers from one to another, and borne aloft in triumph on the points of bloody bayonets, and every man filled his havresack with such provisions as he could lay his hands on.

When this scene of tumult and disorder was ended, the capturers of the Fort Napoleon were mustered in the barrack-square, to receive the thanks of General Hill for the steadiness and dashing gallantry of their conduct throughout the assault. The soldiers burned to give the fine old fellow three hearty cheers, but discipline withheld them.

Addressing himself to Ronald in particular, he thanked him for the dauntless manner in which, on Captain Stuart's fall, he had led the assault. While the general spoke, Ronald felt his heart glowing with the most unalloyed delight, and the reward of being thus publicly thanked before his comrades was sufficient for the dangers he had dared and overcome. "How proud," thought he, "will the people at the old tower of Lochisla be, when they hear of this day's work! And Alice Lisle—surely she—"

Here the soft and plaintive voice of one well known to him broke the chain of his thoughts.

"*O Senor Don Ronald! O por amor de Dios!*" exclaimed Catalina with sudden joy, "for the love of the holy Virgin, protect me!"

"For the love of yourself, rather, fair Catalina," said he, advancing from the flank of his company to where he saw her kneeling on the ground between the close ranks of German rifles, who beheld her distress with sullen apathy. How beautiful she looked then! Her white hands were clasped in an agony of terror, and her long glossy hair rolled in dishevelled ringlets about her fine neck and shoulders. He raised her from the ground.

"Catalina," said he, "I cannot leave my post to see you from the

fort; but do me the favour to take my arm, and pray do not be so agitated. There is no danger now."

"O no—with you I am safe," she replied with a delightful smile of entire confidence, which caused a thrill to pass through Ronald's heart as she placed her arm in his. "*O amigo mio!* what a terrible morning this has been! How terrified I have felt since the roar of the cannon roused me from bed. And you have escaped! Praise be to the Virgin for it! she heard my prayers. Ah! how I trembled for you, when I saw from a loop-hole the black plumes of your regiment."

Ronald pressed the little hand which lay on his arm, but he knew not what to say. A tremor of softness and joy filled his heart, causing him to turn with disgust from the objects of bloodshed and strife that lay everywhere around, and his eyes rested on the donna's radiant features with a pleasure which he had never known till then. How agreeable it was to hear the frank girl talking in this way!

"*O santa Maria!*" she exclaimed with a shudder, after a pause, "I can scarcely look around me, so many fearful sights present themselves everywhere to my eye—sights of which we knew nothing at happy Merida, before the false Napoleon crossed the Pyrenees."

"With God's help, and our good steel, Catalina, we will drive his legions back again, or into the sea at Bayonne; and then again at Merida the fandango, the bolero, and waltz—"

"*Amigo mio*, senor! you speak as might become the Cid Rodrigo; but although your hand may be as stout, and your sword as long as his, why be so rash? How you leaped over the parapet, among the horrid bayonets of the French—"

"You saw me, then?" said Ronald, with delight.

"And trembled for you."

"How fortunate I am to have your good wishes! I dare say you are very happy at being freed from this place?"

"O very—very! But surely it was not on my account that all this frightful work has been made. Perhaps you have heard how I was carried off from Merida?"

"Yes; and I cannot express the uneasiness the relation gave me."

"A French officer, a Major D'Estouville, carried me off across his saddle a captive maiden, by force, as any fierce Moor of Grenada would have done long ago. I have been since a prisoner here."

"Well, but this D'Estouville—"

"Such a gay cavalier he is! But I was very tired of him, and longed to be at pleasant Merida, with its sunny Prado and orange-groves, instead of this dull, guarded fort, with its bulwarks and ditches, cannon and gates. I was much annoyed by Monsieur D'Estouville's speeches and protestations; but 'tis all at an end now, and I trust he has escaped, though I wish not to see his face again. Do you know if he is safe?"

"I saved his life but an hour since," replied Ronald, the pique which he felt at her first observations disappearing. "But I do not see him among the prisoners," he added, examining the sullen and disarmed band as they marched past out of the fort, surrounded by their armed escort commanded by Louis Lisle, from whose cheek the blood was trickling from a sabre-wound, which he heeded not.

The officers on parole uncovered their heads on passing the young lady, who now, when her terror was over, began naturally to feel abashed and confused to find herself leaning on an officer's arm on a military parade, exposed to the gaze of several regiments.

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"Oh, I trust he has escaped; 'twere a thousand pities if so sprightly a soldado should be injured."

"On my word, if you take so great an interest in this rash Frenchman, I shall feel quite jealous."

"You have no reason, senor. I tell you I never wish to see his face again, though it is a very handsome one," responded the donna, with an air of pique, while a purple blush crossed her features. "Holy Mary, would I had my veil here! To be thus gazed at—"

"Here comes one who may give us some information. Macdonald, where is the French commandant—D'Estouville; the young man with the bear-skin cap and crimson feather?"

"With his fathers, I believe, poor fellow. He was a gallant soldier as ever drew sword," replied Alister, who at that moment came past, and paid his respects to Donna Catalina, whom he was not a little surprised to see amidst the ranks of the Highlanders, leaning on Ronald's arm, while her long beautiful tresses streamed about like those of some wood-nymph or goddess.

"I rejoice to see you in safety, senora. I heard of your being in the hands of the enemy,—indeed it made so deep an impression on my *bon camarade*, that he could not keep it a secret. Faith, Stuart," he added in a whisper, "you have picked up something more precious than a skin of Malaga, or a keg of French *eau de vie*."

"Stay, Alister," replied the other, with an air of displeasure; "a truce to raillery. I am sorry to see you wounded."

"A few inches of skin ripped up—a mere nothing," said Macdonald, whose arm was slung in his sash. "I received it from the bayonet of a fine old grenadier, whom Angus Mackie has sent to his long home."

"Well, but the commandant—"

"Poor fellow! I am sorry for his fate,—he seemed so gallant and reckless."

"The devil, man! what has happened?"

"Have you not heard?"

"No; he yielded himself to me, with permission to retain his sword."

"Better had he tossed it into the Tagus! Scarcely had you left him, when up came that fiery borderer, Armstrong, of the 71st (at least I have heard that it was Armstrong), demanding his sword, not being aware of the terms on which he had rendered himself prisoner. The Frenchman, D'Estouville I think you call him, either could not or would not comprehend him; and Armstrong, by a single stroke of his sword, cleft his skull through the thick grenadier cap."

An exclamation of rage and impatience broke from Ronald, and of pity from Catalina, who clasped her hands and raised her dark melancholy eyes to heaven, while he cast an angry and searching glance along the ranks of the Highland Light Infantry.

"Sir Rowland Hill," continued Alister, "regrets this unfortunate circumstance very much, and has sent him off in a bullock-car to Merida, in charge of a French medical officer liberated on his parole. But I must bid you adieu, as our company is ordered to assist Thiele, the German engineer, to destroy the tower and bastions of Ragusa. Heaven knows how we shall accomplish it: it looks as massive as the old pile of Macial in the Western Isles."

"What is that villanous priest about?" said Ronald, when Macdonald had withdrawn, and he saw their guide, with the grey cassock bedaubed with blood, busying himself about the prostrate dead and wounded.

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"Surely he is not plundering. Prick him with your bayonet, Macpherson, and drive him off."

"O no, senor, Heaven forbid!" said the young lady hurriedly. "He must be confessing, or endeavouring to convert some, before they die and are lost for ever."

"Scarcely, Catalina," replied Ronald, seeing they were men of the 71st. "These are true Presbyterians, from a place called Glasgow, in my country, and would as soon hearken to the devil as a Roman Catholic priest."

"How good must be the priest who endeavours to gain the dying soldier from the hot grasp of *Satanas!*" said the lady, not comprehending him. "Call him, Don Ronald; I have not confessed since I left Merida."

"What sins can *you* have to confess, Catalina? Besides, I do not like this fellow. But since you look so imploringly, and desire it so much, I will bring him to you. But let him beware. Ho reverend *gobernador! Senor padre* of the *Convento de todos Santos*, let alone the havresacks of dead men, and come hither."

The priest, starting from his occupation, crossed his hands upon his breast, and came stalking slowly towards them, with his head enveloped in his cope, and his cross and rosary dangling before him.

Catalina, wearied with excess of agitation and the want of sleep, was anxious to procure a female attendant, and to be sent to the village of Almarez, from which she hoped to find some means of travelling to the residence of her cousin and sister, Donna Inesella. And as Ronald's duties at that time required his being alone, he sent her off on Major Campbell's horse, accompanied by the priest and Evan Iverach, whom he desired to see her safe in the best house of the village, and to remain with her until he could come in the evening. Immediately on means being procured to convey the suffering wounded to the rear in blankets, bullock-carts, hurdles of branches, crossed pikes, &c., the forts were ordered by Sir Rowland Hill to be completely destroyed. Eighteen pieces of cannon were spiked and cast into the Tagus. The dead, British and French, friend and foe, the victors and the vanquished, found one common grave. About four hundred corses were tossed into the *avant-fosse*—arms, accoutrements, and every thing, for burial, and a horrible pile they formed, lying heaped over each other like fish in a net. The heavy stone parapets, the *revêtement*, and earthen works were thrown over on them, for the double purpose of covering them up and to dismantle the place. Gates, palisades, and bridges were destroyed, and barracks and store-houses given to the flames, consuming in one universal blaze of destruction everything that could not be carried off.

Ragusa was destroyed by the German artillery, who lodged a quantity of powder in the vaults of the tower, to demolish it effectually by explosion. Lieutenant Thiele, a German officer of engineers, having fired the train, and found that the powder in the vaults did not explode, entered the chamber where it lay, to ascertain the reason. At that instant it blew up, carrying the unfortunate man into the air, amidst a cloud of dust and stones.

From battlement to foundation the massive stone tower, burst and rent, tottered for an instant, and then sunk like a house of cards, but with a mighty crash, which shook the frail cottages of the adjacent village. A shower of stones and mortar was scattered in every direc-

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tion, and the mangled corse of Thiele fell into the river many yards off, and sunk to the bottom unheeded and uncared for.

Such was the storming of Almarez, which took place on the 18th May, 1812; and for the capture of which Sir Rowland, afterwards Lord Hill, received the title of Baron Almarez of the Tagus.

As soon as the laborious work of destruction was completed, the troops were marched from the ruined forts, with their colours flying and drums beating; and ascending the hills of the Lina to the distance of about half a league, bivouacked on their grassy sides. As they retired, Ronald looked back to the place where so many had found a tomb, and where, but for another destiny, he might have found his. Under the mounds made by the levelled ramparts, lay the mangled remains of men, who but a few hours before were in life, and in the full enjoyment of health and spirits. A cloud of dust and smoke yet hung over the ruins, between which the glassy Tagus was flowing still and clear, with its surface glowing in the full splendour of the meridian sun, —flowing onwards as it had done a thousand years before, and as it will do a thousand after those who fought and died at Almarez are forgotten!

Leaving the bivouac on the mountain-side, where fires were lighting and preparations making to regale on what had been found in the stores of the enemy, Ronald, immediately on arms being 'piled,' returned to the village, which he found almost deserted by the population, who were rummaging and searching about the ruins of the forts for whatever they could lay their hands on, heedless of the lamentations made by the widows of some of the slain, who hovered near the uncouth tomb of their husbands.

At the door of a dilapidated cottage, the walls and roof of which appeared to be held together solely by the thick masses of vine and wild roses clambering about them, Ronald found Evan busied in cleaning his musket and harness, which were, of course, soiled with the morning's strife, and chanting the while his favourite "Keek into the draw-well," &c., to drown the monotonous Ave-Maria of an old blind village matron, who was telling over her rosary while she sat on a turf by the door, warming herself in the rays of the bright sun.

He entered softly the desolate earth-floored apartment in which Donna Catalina was awaiting his return. In one corner, with his hands as usual meekly crossed over his bosom, stood the burly and disagreeable figure of the priest,—disagreeable because there was a sort of mystery attached to him, which the shapeless appearance of his garments, and the custom of wearing a cowl instead of a scull-cap or shovel-hat, tended not a little to increase; and Ronald, as a Scotsman and thorough Presbyterian, was naturally not over-fond of any one connected with

"The Paip, that pagan fu' o' pride,"

and consequently he bestowed on the apparently unconscious padre a stern look of scrutiny and distrust. At a little square opening, that served the purpose of a window, and around which the clustering grapes and roses formed a rural curtain, Catalina was seated with her soft pale cheek resting on her hand, which was almost hidden among the heavy curls, the hue of which contrasted with its whiteness. Her dark eyes were intently fixed on the green mountains of the Lina, where the British bivouac was visible. The scabbard of Stuart's claymore jarring on the tiles of the floor, roused her from her reverie, and a rich blush suffused her face, from her temples to her dimpled chin, as she ad-

vanced towards him in her usual confiding and frank manner, and passed her arm through his.

"The reverend father will perhaps retire, and keep the old patrona at the door company in her devotions," said Ronald after some conversation, and the monk immediately withdrew.

"*Ah! senor mio,*" said Catalina in a gentle tone of deprecation, "why do you treat the poor priest so haughtily?"

"I do not like him, Catalina—on my honour I do not; and I believe there is no love lost between us. I could have sworn I saw the cross hilt of a dagger glitter under the cope of his cassock, as he withdrew just now."

"His crucifix, perhaps."

"He told me he carried a dagger, when I confronted him in the wood of Jarciejo."

"Well, 'tis very probable he bears it in these sad times for protection; he can scarcely gain any from cross or cope now. He says he is Father Jerome, of the convent of All Saints at Merida. I think I have heard his voice before: he has not shown his face, as he says a vow compels him to conceal it. But indeed you *must* be respectful to him. The noblest hidalgos and cavaliers in my country respect the poorest Franciscan."

"The meanest clown in mine, Catalina, cares not a rush for the Pope and all his cardinals."

"*Madre-Maria!* I will not listen to you," said she, placing her hand on his mouth. "You must not talk thus; 'tis very sinful. But, alas! you know not the sin of it. Ah! senor, if you love me," she added, blushing deeply, "if you love me as you have said you do, speak not so again."

"Love you, Catalina!" replied the young man, intoxicated with the tenderness of the expression, while he drew her towards him.

"Oh, stay,—what—who is that?" said the lady hurriedly, as the room became suddenly darkened.

"'Tis only that cursed priest."

"Surely it was a British officer; his epaulets glittered among the vine-leaves."

"Was I to find the padre eaves-dropping, his cassock would scarcely save him from a good caning."

"Alas! that would be most foul sacrilege. But speaking of him, reminds me of a plan we had formed just before you came in. I mean to put myself under his escort, and to travel to Truxillo, where the alcalde, or my mother's brother, Don Gonzago de Conquesta, will find me a proper escort to Idanha-a-Velha, where you say my cousin Inesella resides."

"And think you I will intrust you the length of Truxillo with this dubious character,—a priest with a poniard in his robe?"

"*Amigo mio,*" said she, pouting prettily, "surely I can dispose of myself as I please?"

"Catalina, a thousand times I have told you that I prize your safety before my own," said Ronald, kissing her forehead. "I will myself travel with you to Idanha-a-Velha."

"I thank you; but it may not be. I may travel with a padre; but the rules of society would not permit the cavalier or soldado to be my patron or guardian."

"But this priest—"

"You judge of him harshly, indeed. I assure you that he prays

very devoutly, and I can trust myself with him without fear, especially for so short a distance as from this to Truxillo. I have no fear of the French, and neither robber nor guerilla in Spain will insult the relative of so famous a cavalier as Don Alvaro de Villa Franca. Ah! had Alvaro lived in the days when Spain was most glorious, when her chivalry were the first in Europe, his deeds would have outvied even those of the Cid."

Ronald's indecision in this matter was ended by the arrival of an orderly, saying that the colonel wished to see him as soon as possible.

"What a confounded predicament!" exclaimed the impatient Ronald, when the Highlander was gone. "I do not half like intrusting you with this cunning priest; and yet I must,—there is no alternative. I believe I am selected by Sir Rowland Hill to carry the account of this victorious morning to Lord Wellington; and as I cannot protect you myself, I must resign you to him."

Ronald racked his invention to find other schemes, but the young lady had made up her mind, and was obstinate in consequence; therefore her cavalier had to submit, and make such arrangements for her departure as would enable him to repair immediately to Fassifern.

A few *duros* procured D'Estouville's splendid black charger from a Portuguese caçadore, whose share of plunder it had become, and a side-saddle was placed upon it for the lady. The priest had his stout mule, and another was procured for a ruddy, brown-cheeked *paisana*, or young peasant girl, whom Catalina had engaged to accompany her by the way as a female attendant, and who, although she had a proper saddle, thought it did not in the least savour of want of *vergüenza* (modesty) to ride, *à la cavalier*, in the Spanish manner.

Ronald having got all these matters arranged satisfactorily with promptitude and despatch, returned to bid adieu to Catalina, who drooped upon his shoulder, and gave way to a passion of tears.

He was so much agitated by this display of affection and tenderness, that he could scarcely persuade himself to separate from her, and with difficulty restrained a strong inclination to make some rash and formal proposal. But, as he pressed his lip to her pale cheek, he assured her that he would in a very short time obtain leave of absence, and visit her at Idanha-a-Velha.

But for some faint hopes and lingering love for Alice Lisle, Ronald would at this exciting moment have brought matters to a climax with the beautiful donna; and if it is possible for the heart to have *two* loves at once, his was certainly in that singular predicament. His case is truly described in the words of the Scottish song,—

> "My heart is divided between them,
> I dinna ken which I wad hae;
> Right willingly my heart I wad gien them,
> But how can I gie it to twae?
>
> "My heart it is rugged and tormented,
> I'd live wi' or die for them baith;
> I've done what I've often repented,
> To baith I have plighted my aith."

They were reclining in the recess of the opening or window, through which the vines straggled. Poor Catalina, as the hour of departure drew nigh, no longer cared to conceal the sentiments of her heart, but hung on Ronald's breast; while he returned her embrace with ardour, and their glossy hair mingled together in the bright sunshine. At that moment the door was opened, and Louis Lisle entered abruptly.

Having delivered over his prisoners to a cavalry guard among the mountains, he had returned hastily to Almarez, anxious to see Ronald Stuart, and bring about that long-delayed reconciliation and explanation for which he so much yearned,—the few words spoken before the forts were stormed having, to use a common-place phrase, "broken the ice between them." Full of this frank intention, Lisle, after searching the village, had found the cottage where Ronald was; and entering with that unceremonious freedom, which is learned by a residence in camp or quarters, found, to his no small surprise and indignation, that there was one more there than he expected.

Catalina started from Ronald's arm, and hid her blushing cheek in arranging the masses of her luxuriant air. Ronald eyed the unwelcome intruder with a look of surprise, which he was at no pains to conceal; while the latter gave him a fierce glance of impatience, anger, and dislike; and muttering,—"Pardon me. I am, I believe, under a mistake, which will be explained when I have a fitting time and place," he withdrew as hastily as he had entered.

Scarcely had he retired, when the monk of Merida brought his mule and Catalina's horse to the door of the cottage. The lady fastened on her sombrero, with its long veil and white feather. Ronald tied the ribbons of the velvet mantilla, and leading her to the door, assisted her to mount. Her new attendant, the black-eyed paisana,—all blushes and smiles of pleasure at the prospect of a Badajoz hat with a silver band, a pelisse and frock of the best cloth from Arrago de Puerco, trimmed with lace, &c., which her lady had promised her,—appeared mounted, as we have before described, upon a mule, the housings of which were better than the friar's, which consisted entirely of rope.

Poor Victor D'Estouville's black war-steed still had its embossed bit and military bridle, with the outspread wings of the Imperial eagle on its forehead and rich martingale,—which, with the saddle-cloth, embroidered with the badges of the old Guard, formed a strange contrast with the faded side-pad of coarse Zafra leather, which was girthed on it for the lady's accommodation.

When they had departed, he watched their retiring figures as long as they were in sight, until a turn of the road, as they entered the now-deserted pass of Miravete at a gallop, hid them from his view, and he turned towards the bivouac on the mountain side, feeling a heaviness of heart and presentiment of approaching evil, caused probably by a re-action of the spirits after the fierce excitement of the morning, but for which, at that moment, he could not account. His distrust of the padre Jerome, the guide, increased when he recalled and reviewed many suspicious and singular points of his character.

Communing with himself, he was slowly ascending the slope towards the bivouac, forgetting altogether the orders of the colonel, and turning now and then to view the little village of Almarez, embosomed among the umbrageous groves that grew around it, and far up the sides of the undulating Lina behind; the winding Tagus flowing in front, and the vast expanse of landscape and blue sky beyond, were all pleasing objects, and he gazed upon them with the delight of one who knew how to appreciate their beauty. He was aroused from his reverie by hearing his own name called, and on looking about, saw, to his surprise, Major Campbell, reposing his bulky frame in a little grassy hollow. His neck was bare, his coat was unbuttoned, and his belt, sash, &c., lay scattered about. Near him his horse was grazing quietly, but the major seemed inflamed by the utmost anger and excitement. Ronald advanced

hastily towards him, and perceived that his servant, Jock Pentland, was dressing a wound on his neck, which was covered with blood.

"What has happened, Campbell?"

"Such an affair as never happened before, even in Egypt," replied the other furiously, with a mighty oath—sworn in Gaelic, however.

"Nothing very bad, I hope?"

"Only a stab in the neck, three inches by one!"

"I knew not that you were wounded. Surely I saw you safe and sound after the mine was sprung at Ragusa. But I had better send the surgeon, or Stuart, his assistant, to you."

"Oh, no! 'tis a mere scratch, which I would not value a brass bodle, had I received it during the brush this morning; but to gain it as I did,—d—n it! it excites all my fury. Did you see that blasted friar?"

"The guide? I left him but an hour ago. But who wounded you? Surely not the priest?"

"An old acquaintance of yours."

"Of mine!"

"Of yours, by the Lord! The rascal is disguised as a priest of the *Convento de todos Santos* at Merida. A short time ago I met the rogue leading a mule this way: his face was bare,—I knew him instantly, and strove to capture him, that the provost-marshal might in time become acquainted with his throat, which I grasped. Quick as lightning he unsheathed a poniard, and dealt a blow at my neck, which, alighting luckily on my gorget, glanced upwards, giving me a severe cut under the ear."

"Misery! You have not yet told his name."

"Are you really so dull as not yet to have guessed who he is? Tighten the bandage, Jock! I knew the cheat-the-woodie as well as I would have done old Mohammed Djedda, Osmin Djihoun, the shoemaker at Grand Cairo, or any queer carle it has been my luck to meet in campaigning. But come to the bivouac, and I will give you a detailed account of the matter over the contents of a keg of especial good *eau de vie*, which it was my luck to capture this morning."

"'Tis Cifuentes! Powers above! and to him—a bandit and murderous bravo, have I intrusted the guidance of Don Alvaro's sister! I must follow and rescue her from this monster, ere worse may come of it."

"What is all this? Of what do you speak?" said the major, struck with wonder at the other's vehemence and emotion.

"How shall I follow them? Withered be my hand, that it struck not the cowl from his accursed visage, and discovered him ere he outwitted me in such a manner!"

"By the tomb of the Campbells, he has a bee in his bonnet!" continued the major, with increased wonder, while even Jock Pentland (a hard-featured Lowlander with high cheek-bones) stayed his employment to stare at him.

"What tempted the villain to come hither, disguised as a priest?"

"The reward offered by Sir Rowland for a guide,—and perhaps he had some design against your life. He bears you no good will."

"As he has failed in that by my vigilance, the brunt of his hate will fall with double fury on Donna Catalina, to whose noble brother he is an especial foe. This caused the presentiment, the secret feeling of coming evil, which has haunted me this whole morning; and truly, it was not for nought. Major, my resolution is taken: I will set off

across the hills in pursuit of them this instant. You must lend me your horse, and make the best excuse for me you can to the colonel, as I shall not be back till to-morrow perhaps. Ho! now for the chase! Narvaez is likely to find a cairn among the mountains, if he comes within reach of my sword."

He leaped upon Campbell's horse while speaking, and urging it towards the hills, was away in a moment, while the proprietor sprung from the ground, exclaiming hastily, "Holloa! ho, man! What, the devil, is the fellow mad? Halt, Stuart! By heavens! he will break his neck, and the horse's wind, if he rides at that rate. And what shall I do without my horse? I must visit the guards to-night on foot. What on earth can the fellow mean? Surely the uproar of this morning's assault has crazed him! You remember, Pentland, that two of the *Tow-rows** went mad outright after the battle of Alexandria, when we were in Egypt with Sir Ralph."

Heedless alike of the cries, threats, and entreaties which the major sent after him in a voice of no measured compass, on went Ronald, flying at full speed through the bivouac of the 50th regiment, plunging right through a large fire, scattering burning billets, camp-kettles, cook's ration-meat, &c. in every direction. Overturning soldiers and piles of arms in his progress, he drove recklessly on with headlong speed towards the pass of Miravete, down the deep dark gorge of which he galloped just when the purple sun was dipping beyond the western horizon, and the notes of the bugles sounding the evening "retreat" died away on the breeze behind him.

Onward he rode along the narrow mountain-path, the hills becoming darker and loftier, the overhanging crags more awful and precipitous on each side, as they heaved their black fronts over the road, filled with yawning fissures and rents, growing black in the gloom of the evening. But these had no terrors for the Scotsman,—he heeded not the increasing depth of the shadows, or the wild appearance of the basaltic rocks; he kept his eye fixed on the windings of the road, but no trace could he discover of those of whom he was in pursuit. The line of march was dotted with wounded soldiers, straggling on to Merida (whither they had been ordered to retire), and some were dying on the road, unable to proceed farther, while others had expired outright, and were lying neglected by the wayside.

Ronald returned not that evening, and when the troops were paraded next day, he was still absent; and the major's account of the singular manner in which he galloped off among the mountains in no way tended to lessen the anxiety which his friends felt at his unaccountable absence. Cameron, who was a strict disciplinarian, was very indignant, and resolved that the moment he did return, he should be deprived of his sword and put under arrest. The despatch and captured colours of the fortress, together with General Hill's earnest recommendation of Ronald, which it was intended he should have carried to Lord Wellington himself, were sent in charge of Captain Bevan. The same day the victors of Almarez retired, to rejoin the rest of the division at Almendralejo, where Sir William Erskine (who had been left in command) expected hourly to be attacked by Marshal Soult, whose troops, however, never appeared, but kept close within their cantonments in the neighbouring province.

* A familiar name for the grenadiers, as *Light-bobs* for the light infantry, and *Flat-foots* for the battalion men. These old mess-room phrases are going out of the service now.

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Nine days elapsed before the regiments rejoined the division, and no word was yet heard of the missing Stuart, although every inquiry was made at Villa Maria, San Pedro, and Medelin, where they made long halts. He was given over by his frends as a lost man, and poor Evan Iverach was well nigh demented.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MATADOR.

"Her neck is bared, the blow is struck,
The soul has passed away;
The bright, the beautiful is now
A bleeding piece of clay."
Summer and Winter Hours.

RONALD rode at a rapid gallop along the wild mountain-path which I have already described. The evening was growing dark, and in that solitary place the sound of the horse's hoofs alone broke the death-like stillness, and awoke the echoes of the frowning rocks.

In one place lay dead a poor soldier of the 50th regiment. His wife and three little children were clinging to his corpse, and lamenting bitterly. Night was closing around them, and the desolate creatures seemed terrified at its approach in such a wild spot, and called to Ronald loudly as he rode past; but he was too eager to overtake Catalina and her dangerous companion, to waste time unnecessarily. But he made an involuntary stop a little farther on, where a soldier of his own company, a smart young fellow, named Archibald Logan, lay writhing in agony across the road, with the dust of which his blood was mixing as it oozed in heavy drops from a wound in the breast,—a musket-shot having passed through his left shoulder-belt. Ronald reined-in the animal he rode, to stay for a moment and gaze upon him. He was the same young soldier whose aged mother had accompanied him with such sorrow to the beach at Leith, on the morning Major Campbell's detachment embarked, and Ronald (under whose notice this circumstance had brought him) had always admired his soldier-like smartness and steadiness. He was dying now, and evidently in a state of delirium; broken sentences and wild observations fell from his clammy lips. Ronald spoke to him:

"He heard it, but he heeded not; his eyes
Were with his heart, and that was far away."

"O mother! mother!" said he in piercing accents, "dinna upbraid me wi' enlisting and leaving ye. Ye ken weel for what I did it,—to pay my puir auld faither's debt to Peter Grippy, and to free him frae the tolbooth o' Edinburgh. But he wadna allow me, and ca'ed the bounty his bairn's bluid siller. Put yer face close to mine, mother; for I hear yer greetin' and moanin', but I canna see the face I fain would look on. Tell my faither to lay me in the sunny side o' the kirk-yard,—ye ken the place weel. I aye loed to pu' the gowans and blue-bells that grew there in simmer. Menie Ormelie lies there, amang the lang green deid grass; lay me—lay me close to her. O mother! ye ken I loed her weel; we herded the same kye, and—" His voice sunk away into a whisper, and Ronald became deeply affected. After a pause, he continued in the same tone of agony, "Bonnie Menie,—Menie wi' the

gowden hair! She lies between the muckle deid-stane o' the lairds o' Glencorse, and the vault o' the auld folk o' Castle-Outer. Lay me close by her side, and plant some o' the broon heather frae the bonnie Pentlands—the Pentlands I loe sae weel—on the heavy howme that covers me." This was the last effort. A gush of blood spouted from the wound, and he died without a groan.

Stuart could scarce refrain from tears at witnessing the fate of this poor private soldier. Death, amidst the fierce excitement and tumult of battle, where "the very magnitude of the slaughter throws a softening disguise over its cruelties and horrors," is nothing to death when it comes stealing over a human being thus, slowly and gradually, having in it something at once awful and terribly impressive; and Ronald Stuart, blunted and deadened as his feelings were by campaigning, felt this acutely, as he turned away from the corse of his comrade and countryman.

His attention was next arrested by a monstrous raven, or corbie, which sat on a fragment of rock, watching attentively the scene, as if awaiting his coming banquet; but Ronald compelled it to take to flight, by uttering a loud holloa, which reverberated among the rocks of the mountain wilderness. It was now night; but the moon arose above the summits of the hills, glowing through openings in the thin clouds like a shield of polished silver, and pouring a flood of pale light along the pass of Miravete, casting into yet deeper shadow the rifted rocks which overhung it. The speed at which he rode soon left the mountains far behind him, and about midnight brought him close to the gloomy wood of Jarciejo; but on all that line of road he had discovered no trace of Donna Catalina, or the ruffian who had deceived her; and as the country thereabouts was totally uninhabited, he met no one who could give him the slightest information, and his mind became a prey to fear and apprehension that some act of blood or treachery might be perpetrated before he came up with them.

"There they are! Now, then, Heaven be thanked!" he exclaimed, on seeing figures on horseback standing at Saint Mary's well, a rude fountain at the cross-road leading from Truxillo to Lacorchuela, which intersects that from Almarez to Jarciejo. He loosened his sword in the scabbard, but on advancing found that he was mistaken. He met a stout cavalier of Lacorchuela escorting two ladies, whose singular equipage would have inclined him to laugh, had he been in a merrier mood. They were seated on two arm-chairs, slung across the back of a strong mule, and facing outwards, rode back to back. They were enveloped in large mantillas, and their bright eyes flashed in the moonlight, as they each withdrew the *antifaz*, or mask of black silk, which covered their faces to protect them from the dust, the heat of the sun, or the chill night-air when travelling.

Ronald hastily saluted them, and asked their escort if a priest and two females had passed that way? The cavalier, who was mounted on a fine Spanish horse, raised his broad beaver, throwing back his heavy brown cloak as he did so, as if to show that he was well armed by displaying the glittering mountings of the pistols, long stiletto, and massive Toledo sabre, which for protection he carried in the leathern baldric encircling his waist. He said, that when he had first stopped at the fountain to rest, about an hour ago, a priest and two ladies had passed, and taken the road directly for the forest of Jarciejo.

Ronald waited to hear no more, but hurriedly muttering his thanks, urged the good animal he rode to a gallop in the direction pointed out.

regardless as to whether or not the whole band of desperadoes recognising Narvaez Cifuentes as their leader might be in the wood. He had not ridden half a mile further, when the horse of D'Estouville passed him at a rapid trot, with its bridle-rein trailing on the ground and the saddle reversed, hanging under its belly, girths uppermost. Some terrible catastrophe must have happened! A groan broke from Ronald; and in an agony of apprehension for the fate of the fair rider, he madly goaded onward the horse he rode, using the point of his sword as a substitute for spurs, which as a regimental infantry officer he did not wear.

The mules of the priest and *paisana*, grazing the herbage at the entrance of the wood, next met his view. The light-coloured garments of a female form lying on the road, caused him to spring from the saddle in dismay. It was not Catalina, but the poor peasant girl of Almarez: her gilt crucifix, which she had worn ostentatiously on her bare bosom, was gone, as was likewise the trunk-mail which she had carried. She was lying dead, stabbed by a dagger in the throat, where a ghastly wound appeared. The feathers and veil of Catalina's hat lay fluttering near, and the bruised and torn appearance of the grass and bushes bore evidence that some desperate struggle had taken place here. These outrages seemed to have been committed recently, as the cheek of the dead girl was yet warm and soft when Ronald touched it.

"God help you, Catalina! My thoughtlessness has destroyed you: 'tis I that have done all this!" he exclaimed, as he struck his hand passionately upon his forehead, and reeled against a tree.

"*O gracios caballero!*" said a decrepit and wrinkled old man, arrayed in the garb of some religious order, emerging as if from concealment among the trees; "a most horrible scene has been acted here. I saw it from among the olive-bushes, where I lay sleeping till the noise awoke me."

"The donna, *mi amigo*,—the young lady, where is she? Tell me, for the love of that Virgin you adore so much!"

"*O los infidelos!* and dost not thou adore her?" asked the old man querulously, while his sunken and bleared eyes kindled and lighted up.

"Trifle not, old man, but tell me instantly!" cried Stuart, in a hoarse and furious voice.

"'Twas done in a moment,—*en quitam alla essas pajas*, as the proverb says."

"Curse on your proverb—"

"'Tis no business of mine, *senor soldado*, and I will have nought to do with it. *A otro perro con esse huesso*, says the proverb."

"Wretch! you will drive me distracted! Tell me what you have seen, or, in despite of your grey hairs, I will cleave you to the teeth. The senora—"

"Was dragged into the forest about an hour ago, and horrible noises have come from it ever since, disturbing me and keeping me from sleep. 'Tis hard for an old man to be annoyed: the proverb says—"

"Silence!" replied the other, placing his hand on the toothless mouth of the poor dotard. "Surely I heard something!"

At that moment a despairing cry, such as it is seldom one's lot to hear, arose from the dingles of the wood, and seemingly at no great distance. Stuart waited to hear no more, but rushed with his drawn weapon towards the spot, making the forest ring with threats, cries, and the bold holloa with which he had learned to awake the echoes of his native hills and rocks. His Highland habits as a forester and

huntsman, acquired under the tuition of Donald Iverach, when tracking the fox and the deer, gave him good aid now, and unerringly he followed the direction of that terrible cry.

He had not penetrated above a hundred yards among the beeches and cork-wood, when, on breaking into a narrow pathway, he found lying motionless on the sod and bedabbled with blood, from a wound in her bosom, the unfortunate of whom he was in search.

"Catalina of Villa Franca! Adored Catalina!" he exclaimed, in accents of horror and affection, as he tossed his sword from him and sunk down beside her on his knees; "this—this is all my doing. I have brought you to destruction by intrusting you, in an evil hour, to a bandit and matador!"

He had no idea of pursuing the assassin. His whole soul was wrapt up in the sad spectacle before him, and he thought only of endeavouring to save her, if possible, before she perished from loss of blood, which was flowing freely from a deep dagger-wound in her pure and beautiful neck, evidently from the same weapon which had struck Major Campbell, and slain the *paisana* by a blow in the same part of the frame. Her bosom was exposed and covered with the red current, which stained the moonlit leaves and petals of the forest flowers where she lay. Unflinchingly had Ronald that morning beheld men weltering and wallowing in blood; but he shrunk in agony at the sight of Catalina's.

"Catalina de Villa Franca! dearest, hear my voice! Speak to me. Never until this moment of horror and woe did I know how much I loved you." He rent the silk sash from his shoulder* and endeavoured to stanch the blood, while the unfortunate girl opened her lustrous eyes, and gazed upon him with a look which, while it told of exquisite pain—of love and delight, too surely convinced him, by its terrible expression, that she was—dying.

"You have come, Ronald. I expected you many—many months ago," she whispered in broken accents, while her wild black eyes were fixed on his with an expression of tenderness. "Hold me up, dearest—hold me up, that I may look upon you for the last time,—on the face I have loved so long, and used to dream about in the long nights at Merida and Almarez. O that my brother, Alvaro, was here too! Holy—holy Mother of God! look on me—I am dying!"

"Ah, Catalina! speak not thus: every word sinks like a sword into my heart. Dying! oh, it cannot be! You shall live if the aid of art and affection can preserve you. You *shall* live," he added frantically, "and for *me*."

"O no—never—not for you!" she said bitterly, in tones gradually becoming more hollow; "it may not be. Alas! I am not what I was an hour ago. I cannot,—I cannot now be yours, even should I escape death, whose cold hand is passing over my heart."

"Almighty Power, preserve my senses! What is this you say?" he replied, raising her head upon his knee, and gathering in his hand the soft dishevelled curls which streamed freely upon the turf. "What mean these terrible words, Catalina?"

Before she replied, a shudder convulsed her frame, and drops of white froth fell from her lips. A strange light sparkled in her eyes; there was something singularly fearful and beautiful in the expression of her pale countenance at that moment.

"I need not shrink from telling you the dreadful truth,—I need not

* The crimson sash is worn over the left shoulder in Highland regiments.

deceive you," she added, speaking more fluently as a passionate flow of tears relieved her. "I feel in my heart a sensation which announces that the moment of dissolution is at hand. I hail it with joy,—I wish not to live. The wretch who deceived us has robbed me of that which is most precious to a woman, and then with his dagger—"

A moan escaped the lips of Ronald, and he gnashed his teeth with absolute fury, while big drops, glittering in the moonlight, stood upon his pale forehead, and his throat became so swollen that he was almost choked. He snatched up his sword, and with difficulty restrained the inclination he felt to rush deeper into the wood, in search of Cifuentes.

But how could he leave Catalina, the torn and disordered condition of whose garments, together with the wounds and bruises on her delicate hands and arms, bore evidence that a desperate struggle had taken place before the first outrage was accomplished. Stuart reeled as if a ball had passed through his brain, and the forest-trees seemed to rock around him as if shaken by an earthquake. The fierce emotion passed away, and was succeeded by a horrible calmness,—a feeling of settled and morbid desperation. He passed his hand once or twice over his brow, as if to clear his thoughts and arrange them before he again knelt beside Catalina, who had closed her eyes and lay still, as if in a deep slumber. He thought that the spirit had passed from her; but the faint beating of her heart, as he laid his cheek on her soft breast, convinced him that she yet lived. Raising her from the ground, he endeavoured to make his way through the wood to where he had left the aged priest, to the end that some means might be procured to save her life, if it was yet possible to do so. But he had not borne her a dozen yards when the branch of a tree tore off the sash with which he had hastily bound up the wound, and the blood gushed forth with greater violence than before.

"Mother Mary, be gracious unto me! and forgive me if I think of aught else than heaven in this awful moment!" murmured Catalina in a soft and plaintive voice. "Ah, the pangs, the torments I endure! Oh, *mi querida*, carry me no farther; 'tis useless,—I am dying. Alas dishonoured as I am, I would not wish to live. Lay me down here, where the grass is soft and green. Ronald, here ends our love and my hope together!"

In Stuart's face there was an expression which pen can never describe, as he laid her down gently on the turf, and sustaining her head upon his arm, bent over her in silent sorrow and misery.

"Are you near me still, *mi querida?*" she murmured tremulously.

"Catalina, I am yet with you,—my arm is around you."

"Alas! the light has left my eyes; death is darkening my vision."

"Mercy of Heaven! it cannot be thus,—they are bright as ever; but a cloud has overshadowed the moon."

"Ronald, it is the hand of death; I see you no longer. Are you near me?"

"My hands are pressing yours,—alas! they are very cold and clammy."

"I feel them not; the numbness of my limbs will soon extend to my breast. When I am gone, let twelve masses be said for my soul. Alas, you will think them of no use! But promise me this, that I may die more easily and peacefully."

"I do, Catalina, I do."

"O that Alvaro was here, that I might hear the sound of his voice, —that he might hear mine for the last time before I pass to the world

of shadows. He will be lonely in the world without me. Alvaro is the last of his race,—the last of a long line of illustrious hidalgos. Holy Lady of Majorga,—sweet *San Juan de Dios*, intercede for me! Dearest Ronald, kiss me—kiss me for the last time, while I have yet feeling, for death is chilling my whole frame."

In an agony of love and sorrow, he passionately pressed his lips to those of the dying girl. She never spoke again. It almost seemed as if he had intercepted her last breath, for at the moment their lips met, a slight tremor passed over her whole form, and the pure spirit of the beautiful donna had fled for ever.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EL CONVENTO DE SANTA CRUZ.

"The abbess was of noble blood,
But early took the veil and hood;
Ere upon life she cast a look,
Or knew the world that she forsook."

Marmion, canto ii.

GREY daylight was straggling through the mullioned windows of the nunnery of Santa Cruz de Jarciejo, which stood close on the skirts of the wood, when the portress was aroused from her straw pallet by a loud peal at the bell, which hung in the porch. On withdrawing the wooden cover of the vizzy-hole in the outer door, she crossed herself, and turned up her eyes; and instead of attending to those without, ran to tell the lady abbess that a British officer on horseback, bearing in his arms a dead woman, had been led thither by the old padre Ignacio el Pastor, who was demanding admittance. The abbess, who in the convent was known as *El Madre Santa Martha*, had many scruples about opening the gates to them, but another tremendous peal at the bell, seconded by a blow which Ronald dealt with the basket-hilt of his sword on the iron-studded door, put an end to the matter, and she desired the portress to usher them into the *parlatorio*. Entering the gateway in the massive wall surrounding the gardens of the convent, they were led through the formal lines of flower-beds and shrubbery to the main building, where a carved Gothic door in a low round archway, on the key-stone of which appeared a mouldered cross, gave them admittance to the chamber called the *parlatorio*, where the sisters were allowed to receive the visits of their friends at the iron gratings in a stone screen which crossed the room, completely separating it from the rest of the convent. These grates were strong bars of iron, crossed and re-crossed with wire, so as to preclude all possibility of touching the inmates, who now crowded close to them, all gazing with amazement and vague apprehension at the corpse of the young lady, which the officer deposited gently on a wooden bench, and seated himself beside it in apathetic sorrow, unmindful of the many pitying eyes that were fixed upon him. Meanwhile the lady abbess, a handsome woman about twenty, with a stately figure, a remarkably fine face, and soft hazel eyes, entered the apartment, and advanced to where Catalina lay, with the tenderest commiseration strongly marked on her features, which, like those of the sisterhood, were pale and sallow from confinement.

For an explanation of the scene before her, she turned to the decrepit

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old priest Ignacio el Pastor, or *the Shepherd*, a name which he had gained in consequence of his having become a guardian of Merino sheep among the mountains of the Lina on the demolition of his monastery, which had been destroyed by the French troops when Marshal Massena was devastating the country in his retreat.

Interlarding his narrative with many a Spanish proverb, he related the tale of Catalina's assassination. The querulous tones of his voice were interrupted by many a soft expression of pity and pious ejaculation from the sisters at the grating, gazing with morbid curiosity on the fair form of the dead, whose high bosom was covered with coagulated blood, and the long spiral curls of whose ringlets swept the pavement of the chamber.

The lady abbess, who was far from being one of those sour, ancient dames that the superiors of convents are generally reputed to be, seated herself by Ronald's side, and seeing that, although his proud dark eyes were dry and tearless, he was deeply afflicted, she prayed him to be comforted; but he hid his face among the thick tresses of the dead, and made no immediate reply.

"She is indeed most beautiful! As she now lies, her features wear a sublimity which might become an image of Our Lady," observed the abbess, passing her hand softly over the cold white brow of Catalina. "She seems only to sleep,—her white eyelids and long black lashes are so placidly closed! And this is the sister of the noble Cavalier de Villa Franca, of whom we hear so much? If man can avenge, Don Alvaro will do it amply."

"Avenge her!" muttered Ronald, through his clenched teeth. "Noble senora, that task shall be mine—"

"Alas! cavalier," interrupted the abbess, "we commit a deadly sin in talking thus."

"*Echemos pelillos a la mar*, says the proverb; we must forget and forgive," chimed in El Pastor. "Vengeance belongs not to this earth, —'tis not ours, miserable reptiles that we are. What sayeth the holy writ? Lo, you now—"

"Peace, Ignacio; I would speak. You are getting into the burden of some old sermon of yours, and it is a wonder you put so many words together without another proverb," said the lady abbess, as she took Ronald's hand kindly within her own, which indeed was a very soft and white one. "El Pastor's account of this affair is somewhat confused. Tell me, senor, how long it is since this dreadful deed was perpetrated."

"But yesternight—only yesternight. To me it appears as if a thousand years had elapsed since then, and the events of years ago seem to have passed but yesterday. All is confusion and chaos in my mind."

"The noble senora was, perhaps, some relation of yours?"

"No. She is of Spain,—I of Scotland."

"Your wife, possibly, senor?"

"My wedded wife indeed she would have been, had she lived; but that resolve came too late!" he replied in a troubled voice, as he pressed the hand of Catalina to his lips. "But, senoritas, I must not spend longer time in childish sorrow," he added, starting up and erecting his stout and handsome figure before the eyes of the sisterhood, who, in spite of their veils and hoods, knew how to admire a smart young soldier with a war-worn suit of harness. "It would not become me to do so, and my duties call me elsewhere. Every means must be taken to bring retribution on the head of the demon Narvaez, and I trust that the great Power which suffers no crime to pass unpunished, will aid me

in discovering him one day before I leave Spain. Divine vengeance will again place him at my mercy, as he has been twice before, when, but for my ill-timed interference, Don Alvaro had slain him, and my heart leaps within me at the thought of having his base blood upon my weapon. Yes, senoritas, his blood, shed with my own hands, and streaming hot and thick upon them, can alone avenge the death of Catalina. Some fatality seems continually to throw this monster in my way; and if ever we cross each other again, most fully, amply, and fearfully shall this unfortunate be revenged; for I have sworn a secret oath—an oath which may not be broken—that wherever I meet Cifuentes within the realm of Spain, on moor or mountain, in city, camp, or field, there will I slay him, though the next moment should be my last."

His form appeared to dilate while he spoke, and his eyes sparkled with a keen and fiery expression, which attested the firmness of his determination and the bold recklessness of his heart. The excitement under which he laboured imparted a new eloquence to his tones, and grace to his gesture; but he panted rather than breathed while he spoke; and the fierce glitter of his eye, together with the strange ferocity of the words which his love and sorrow prompted, caused the timid nuns of Santa Cruz to shrink back from the iron gratings.

"Ah! senor," said the abbess, laying her hand upon his shoulder, "I have already said vengeance is not ours. But you have spoken gallantly!"

"A noble cavalier! Viva!" cried El Pastor, in a chuckling tone; "Hernandez de Cordova could not have spoken more bravely. *Bueno somo el pan*, as the old proverb tells us."

But when this burst of passion evaporated, he was again the sad and sorrowful young man that he had at first appeared. As he refused to partake of any refreshment, although pressed by the abbess to do so, the padre El Pastor led him out to the convent garden, while the nuns made preparations for the entombment of Catalina in their oratory, or chapel. It was a bright sunshine morning; but Ronald was careless of its beauty and of the fragrance of the flowers freshly blooming in the morning dew; the beautiful arrangements of the place, the arbours, the sparkling fountains, the statues of stone and marble,—he passed them all by unheeded. Hobbling by his side, El Pastor, instead of endeavouring to console him for his loss, poured into his unheeding ears, with a string of old proverbs and wise saws, a tough lecture for the irreverend manner in which he had treated the name of *Madre-Maria* the evening before, until the impatient Highlander strode away, and left him to commune alone.

That night Catalina was buried in the chapel. The building was brilliantly illuminated with coloured lamps, the softened lights of which were reflected from the gilded columns—from the organ, with its tall row of silver trumpet-like pipes—from the rich altars and statues of polished metal placed in niches, where golden candlesticks bore tall twinkling tapers, which from their recesses cast a strange light on the marble tombs of knights and long-departed warriors, whose rusty swords, spurs, and faded banners were yet in some places hung over them, and whose deeds were represented on the ancient pieces of mouldy and moth-eaten tapestry which hung gloomily on the side-walls of the chapel, contrasting strongly with the glittering images and gorgeously-coloured scripture-pieces, many of them said to be the productions of

Alonza Cano, the Michael Angelo of Spain, who flourished during the seventeenth century.

Ronald Stuart, the only mourner there, walked by the side of the shell, or basket of wicker-work, which contained all that remained of Catalina, and which was borne through the chapel and deposited on the high altar by six of the youngest nuns—three on each side, carrying it by handles projecting from the sides of the frame.

The requiem for the dead was now chanted, and the dulcet notes of the lofty organ, blending in one delightful strain with the melodious voices of the nuns, ringing among the pillared aisles, echoing in the hollow vaults, and dying away in the distant arches of the cloisters, produced such heavenly sounds as subdued the heart of Stuart, softening and soothing his sorrow. He listened in a sort of ecstasy, almost deeming that the thrilling voice of Catalina was mingled with the inspiring harmony he heard. He was moved to tears, tears of sadness and enthusiasm, and almost involuntarily he sunk on his knees at the marble steps of the altar, an attitude which raised him immensely in the estimation of El Pastor and the sisterhood, while the bright eyes of the mitred abbess sparkled as she stretched her white hands glittering with jewels over him, as if welcoming him to that church, the tenets of which he had never yet inquired into. He had knelt down thus merely from excess of veneration and a holy feeling, with which the sublime service of the Roman Catholic church had inspired him. The music arose to its utmost pitch at that moment; the voices of the nuns and choristers mounted to the full swell; the trumpets of the organ pealed along the groined roof, and caused the massive columns and the pavement beneath them to tremble and vibrate with the soul-stirring grandeur of the sound.

In the chancel, before the great altar, a pavement stone had been raised and a deep grave dug, the soil of which lay piled in a gloomy heap on the lettered stones around its yawning mouth.

On the chant being ended, four priests bore the bier of Catalina to the side of the grave which was to receive her. The wicker coffin or shell had no lid, and Ronald now looked upon her pale and still beautiful features for the last time. She was not enveloped in a ghastly shroud, but, after the fashion of her own country, had been arrayed by the nuns in a dress of the whitest muslin, adorned with the richest lace and edgings of needle-work. Her fine hair was disposed over her neck and bosom. A large chaplet of freshly-gathered white roses encircled her forehead, giving her the appearance of a bride dressed for the bridal rather than a corse for the tomb; and, but for the mortal paleness of her complexion, one would have supposed that she only slept, so placidly did her closed eye-lashes repose upon her soft cheek.

While a slow, sad, but exquisitely melancholy dirge arose, the barefooted priests proceeded to lower her into the cold damp grave, but in a manner so peculiar and revolting, that the lover, who had never witnessed a Spanish interment before, almost sprung forward to stay their proceeding. Instead of lowering the coffin into the grave, they took out the body, permitting it to sink gently into its narrow bed without other covering than the lace and muslin, part of which El Pastor drew over her face and ringlets, to hide them from mortal eyes for ever. Each monk now seized a shovel, and rapidly the coffinless remains were covered up with dry sand, provided for the purpose.

The feelings of poor Ronald were sadly outraged at the barbarous mode of interment common in Spain for those not of the families of

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grandees, but remonstrance would have been unavailing. The scraping and jarring of the iron shovels on the pavement, as they hurled in decayed bones, damp red clay, stones, and sand on that fair and unprotected form, grated horribly on his ears; but how did he shrink and revolt from the *pummelling* of the body! A stout padre, seizing a billet of wood, shod with an iron ferule like a pavier's rammer, began to tread upon the grave and rapidly beat down the earth into it, so that all that had been taken out should be again admitted. He had not given a dozen strokes in this disgusting manner, before Ronald shook off his apathy; and grasping him by the cope, dragged him fiercely backwards, commanding them at once to desist from a proceeding so distressing. Two priests, with the aid of iron levers, deposited a slab of marble above the tomb, and it was closed for ever. It bore the hastily-carved legend,—

Aqui yace Catalina de Villa Franca.

The slab probably remains yet in the chapel, if the convent of Santa Cruz has escaped the wars of the Carlists and Christinos. As soon as this sad ceremony was concluded, Ronald retired.

Two-and-thirty years have now elapsed since the tomb closed over Catalina, but time has not yet effaced from Stuart's memory the emotions which he felt when hearing the sound of the dull, cold earth falling on her unshrouded bosom! In the *parlatorio* he composed himself to write a long letter to Donna Inesella, giving an account of her cousin's destruction, and bitterly upbraiding himself as being the leading cause in the affair, although in reality he was not. The reader will remember, that it was her own desire and determination to confide herself to the care of the pretended priest at Almarez.

Owing to the tumult in his mind, Ronald found the composition of the letter no easy task, especially as that garrulous old man, El Pastor, remained at his elbow, chattering away on unconnected subjects, and bringing out now and then some musty Spanish proverb.

"Look ye, senor," said he, regardless of the blots and blunders that his interruptions caused Stuart to make; "do you see that image of our Holy Lady in the niche yonder?"

"Well, padre."

"'Tis the work of Alonza Cano."

"Pshaw! what is that to me? I never heard of the gentleman before."

"He was the first of Spanish architects and painters, and with his own hands adorned many of our finest churches and palaces. He was born at Grenada in the year 1600, and as the proverb says—"

"Never mind what it says. For heaven's sake, *mi amigo*, leave me to write in peace."

"Did you but know that he lost the woman he loved by a dagger-stroke from a matador, you would probably care more for the story of his singular misfortunes."

"Pardon me, padre," said Ronald, with a melancholy interest; "what were they?"

"The full career of Alonza's glory was cut short thus. One evening, on returning home, he found his wife, a most beautiful woman, lying dead, with a dagger planted in her heart. His servant, a vile Italian, the perpetrator of the deed, had fled, and by order of the alcalde mayor, Alonza was arrested, and charged with having slain the lady in a fit of jealousy. The dagger which the assassin used was known to be that of

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Alonza; he was a man naturally of a fierce and jealous temper, and had kept watchful eyes on the senora, who was the handsomest woman that ever promenaded on the Prado, or Plaza, at Madrid; and the compliments paid her by the gay cavaliers and guardsmen of the capital were as molten lead poured into the heart of her husband, though of course very proud of her, for she was a fine creature,—*Como un palmito*, as the old proverb says."

"Is this all the story, Ignacio?"

"The rest is yet to come. The *tail* is the worst, senor; as the old saw says,—*Aun le falta la cola por desollar.*"

"The devil take your saws and proverbs! You are as full of them as your countryman Sancho Panza."

"Well, senor; Alonza was racked without mercy to extort confession, and he endured the most horrible torments without uttering a word to criminate himself. By the king's order he was set free, and died at a great age, a poor priest like myself. In his dying hour, when a brother held the crucifix before his glazing eyes, he desired him to remove it, saying the image of our Saviour was so clumsily done, that the sight of it pained him; as the proverb says, senor, *De paja*—"

But Ronald did not permit him to finish the adage, requesting him to retire in a manner that was not to be disputed. Early next morning he was despatched to Idanha-a-Velha, bearing the letter for Donna Inesella. He resolutely refused to take a single maravedi to defray his expenses, although the journey was a very long one. So simple were his habits of living, learned while a shepherd among the mountains, that he could easily subsist on charity and what he could pick up by the wayside, where ripe oranges, luscious grapes, and juicy pumpkins grew wild, or by chanting songs to the sound of the rebeck,—a primitive kind of guitar, having only three strings.

"I am accustomed to a wandering life, senor," said he, as he bade Ronald adieu; "it suits and squares with me perfectly,—*Quadrado y esquinado*, as the proverb has it. Frail and withered as I appear, I can well bear fatigue, and am as tough as an old toledo, and will undertake to reach Idanha-a-Velha almost as soon as if mounted on the best mule that ever bore the sign of the cross on its back."

To keep his promise, pledged to Catalina, Ronald paid into the treasury of the convent two golden *onzas*, to obtain masses for her departed spirit. Let it not be imagined for a moment that he believed in their efficacy; but he remembered that it was Catalina's wish—indeed, almost her last request, that such should be done, and he paid the onzas rather as a duty of affection than religion. This act left him in indifferent pecuniary circumstances, as it carried off the whole month's subsistence which he had received from the regimental paymaster after the storm of Almarez. Pay was a scarce matter with the Peninsular troops, who, at the time the battle of Vittoria was fought, had not received a single farthing for upwards of six months.

An apartment opening off the *parlatorio* had been fitted up for Ronald, by the orders of the lady abbess, and perhaps this was the only occasion ever known of a man sleeping under the roof of the convent of the Holy Cross,—an event which, had it happened during the days of the terrible Inquisition, would probably have been the means of dooming the abbess to death, and her nuns to some severe penance.

It was a gloomy little chamber, with a grated window, through which came the rays of the moon, and the rich fragrance of flowers from

the garden. A gaudily-painted Spanish bedstead, without curtains, stood in one corner, and a solitary chair resting in another constituted its furniture, unless I include a large wooden crucifix reared against the wall, and a skull, ghastly and grinning, placed near it on a bracket. Ronald scarcely slept during all that night. His mind was alternately a prey to the deepest sorrow and wildest longings for vengeance, that the human heart is capable of feeling. Many were the plans which his fertile imagination suggested for the discovery of the matador; but owing to the totally disorganized state of the country, the subversion of its laws, and the weakness of its civil authorities, he was aware that his attempts would be alike fruitless and unavailing, and that the cavalier, Don Alvaro, from the rank of his family, his known bravery, and favour among the populace, would be more likely to have him brought to justice.

At times, when the outrage which Catalina had suffered came vividly into his imagination, his blood boiled within him, and his heart panted with a tiger-like feeling for revenge—deep, deadly, and ample revenge; and nothing short of the blood of Cifuentes, shed with his own sword, could satisfy the cravings he felt for retribution. The next moment he was all subdued in grief and tenderness, when he remembered the happy days he had spent with Catalina at Merida, the soft expression of her eyes, the sweet tones of her voice, their rambles among the ruins and rich scenery of the city, its sunny streets and shady public walks, where she was the leading belle, and the glory, delight, and admiration of the cloaked and moustached cavaliers, and the envy of the veiled and stately donnas who frequented the green Prado in the evening, or promenaded under the cool arches of the *paseo* during the hottest part of the day. While the recollections of these departed moments of transitory enjoyment passed in quick succession through his mind, Alice Lisle was not forgotten; but the remembrance of her only added to the tortures of that mental rack on which Stuart appeared to be stretched.

Thoughts of the days that were gone—days spent in perfect happiness with her—thoughts that he strove in vain to repel, arose at times, causing his divided heart to swell within his bosom till its cords seemed about to snap. Love struggled strongly with love in his breast. He unclasped the miniature of Alice, and gazed upon it by the light of the moon. He had not looked upon it for many, many months, and his eyes filled with tears while he did so now, and recalled the joyous expression of her hazel eye and merry ringing of her girlish laugh; but when he thought of Lord Hyndford, the newspaper paragraph, and the cold conduct of her brother, he closed it with vehemence, and looked upon it no more that night. Even a long wished-for slumber, when it came at last, was disturbed by dreams no less painful than his waking thoughts.

He imagined that he was in the splendid chapel of Santa Cruz, and that Catalina stood beside him in all her dignity and beauty, arrayed as he had seen her last in a profusion of white lace and muslin. She yet lived! The idea of her death was but a horrible dream. Oh what ecstasy was in that thought! No black tomb was yawning in the chancel, but the aisles were crowded by a gay party, whose forms appeared wavering, indistinct, and indescribable. But Ronald reeked not of them; Catalina was there, with her eyes sparkling, her cheek blushing, and her tresses flowing as of old, and orange-buds were entwined with the white roses of her coronal. He embraced her—but

le! a change came over the features of the Spanish maiden, and they became the softer, but equally beautiful features of Alice Lisle! A low and heavenly melody stole upon his ears: he started, and awoke.

The music he had heard in his sleep was filling every part of the convent, announcing that morning matins had begun. Stuart sprang from the couch, troubled with his visions, and unrefreshed by his slumbers. He hastily donned his regimentals, and entering the chapel, seated himself in that part which was separated from the nuns by a strong but richly gilt iron railing. He was surveyed with no small interest by the sequestered sisterhood, to whom it was an uncommon event to have within their walls a male guest, so different from the bearded and shorn priests who came as privileged individuals. A handsome young soldado, wearing the martial garb of a land which was, in their ideas of geography, at an immense distance, and of which they had strange notions, especially of the ferocity and wildness of its mountaineers, was an object of thrilling interest to these timid creatures, who trembled at the very mention of the dangers which their military guest had seen and dared. He was very different from Pietro, their deformed gardener, or El Pastor, that budget of proverbs, who was their daily visitor; and many bright and beautiful eyes, though screened by hood of serge and veil of lawn, were fixed searchingly upon him from the organ-loft and altar-steps; but their presence was unheeded and uncared for by Stuart, whose eyes were bent on the grey slab in the centre of the chancel, while his thoughts were with the cold and coffinless form that lay beneath it, bruised and crushed down in that dark and gloomy hole under a load of earth. It was not until the matins were ended, and the sisters had withdrawn, that he remembered where he was, and that the sooner he prepared to rejoin his regiment and apologize for his singular absence the better. Indeed he had begun to feel some most unpleasant qualms and doubts as to the issue of the matter, with so strict a commanding officer as Cameron of Fassifern—*the chief*, as he was named by the mess; and visions of a general court-martial, a formidable array of charges, and a sentence to be cashiered, "a sentence of which His Majesty is most graciously pleased to approve," arose before him.

He knew not whither the troops might have marched from Almarez; and he feared that by crossing the Lina hills, which were many miles distant, he might fall into the hands of the French, who he knew occupied the adjacent country. For some time he was at a loss how to act; but, after due consideration, was led to believe that he might fall in with some of the British troops at Truxillo, for which place he determined to depart immediately, remembering at the same time that he should have to appease the wrath of the Buenos Ayrean campaigner Don Gonzago, who would undoubtedly be very indignant at his niece's interment without his knowledge; but, in fact, Ronald Stuart had totally forgotten the existence of her uncle, which was the reason of the oversight. As he left the chapel, he was met by the demure and starched old portress, who invited him to breakfast with the lady abbess in an arbour in the garden. It would have been inconsistent with courtesy and gallantry to have refused, and contrary to his own inclination, for in truth he was half famished, as he had not 'broken bread' since the night before the capture of Almarez, and nature demanded nourishment. In the arbours of the garden, which were formed of heavy masses of blooming rose-trees, honeysuckle, and vines, supported by green painted trellis-work, the nuns were seated at their

simple repast, which was no sooner over, than they commenced their daily occupation of making pin-cushions, embroidered shirt-collars, tinting fans, and working brocade dresses, all of which were sold for the benefit of the poor, or of the funds of the convent.

In a large arbour, at the back of which a cool spring of sparkling water bubbled up in a marble basin, the smiling abbess was seated, awaiting her guest. The table was covered with a white cloth, wrought over with religious emblems, variously coloured, and in elaborate needle-work. A Spanish breakfast is usually a very simple one, but the abbess had made an unusual display this morning. There were platters filled with grapes and oranges, freshly pulled from the branches that formed the roof of the arbour. A vase of boiled milk, flanked by two silver cups of chocolate—so thick that the spoons stood in it, bread, butter, eggs, jellies, and marmalade, composed the repast; to which was added a flask of the wine of Ciudad Real, a place long famous for the quality of its produce.

The abbess did the honours of the table with a grace which showed that, when *in* the world, she had been accustomed to the best society in Spain. There was a sweetness in her tones and an elegance in every movement, which could not have failed to charm one less absorbed in other thoughts than Ronald Stuart. However, he could not help remarking the fine form of her hands, the dazzling whiteness of her arm, and the beauty of her dark brown curls, which she wore in unusual abundance, and showed rather more than was quite in character with one of her profession. Stuart was too full of thought to prove an agreeable companion, and behaved, I dare say, so very inattentively, that the gay abbess thought him a very dull fellow, notwithstanding his Highland uniform, and the lively account he gave of his own distant home and what he had seen on service in Spain.

After paying a last visit to the tomb of Catalina, he departed from the convent. The abbess made a sign of the cross on his forehead, kissed him on both cheeks, gave him her solemn blessing in Latin, and dismissed him at the back gate of the building, which stood on the Truxillo road.

As he rode along, mounted again on Campbell's horse, many a glance he gave behind him, not at the figure of the abbess, who waved her kerchief from the gate, but at the Gothic pinnacles and high stone roof of the chapel, beneath which lay the mortal remains of the once generous and ardent Catalina.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SINGLE COMBAT.

"And lang they foucht, and sair they foucht,
Wi' swords of mettyl kene;
Till clotted bluid, in mony a spot,
Was sprynkelit on the grene." *Gilmanscleugh.*

It was a delightful summer morning: there was an exhilarating freshness in the air, which raised the spirits of Stuart, as the distance increased between him and the scene of his sorrows. The merry birds were hopping and chirping about from spray to spray; the wild flowers which blossomed by the wayside were giving forth their richest perfume,

and expanding their dewy cups and leaves to the warmth of the rising sun. Behind him lay the dark wood of Jarciejo, and above it arose the curved ridges of the Lina,—their bright tints mellowed by distance as they stretched away towards New Castile. Before him lay a long tract of beautiful country, tufted woods and vineyards, with here and there yellow cornfields, rocks surmounted by old feudal strongholds, most of them ruinous, and in many places by the roadside the blackened remains of the cottages of the *paisanos* marked the ruthless devastations made by Massena in his retreat some time before.

Ronald would have contemplated with delight the varying of the landscape as he rode along, but for the sorrow which pressed heavy upon his heart, intermingled with certain fears of what his reception might be at the regiment after so unaccountable a desertion, and in what light it might be viewed by his brother officers. Full of these exciting ideas, at times he drove his horse furiously forward, as if he strove to leave his thoughts behind him, and shorten as much as possible the distance between himself and his comrades. He longed to behold the embattled towers, the slender spires and belfries of Truxillo, where he hoped to find his comrades, and explain his singular disappearance; but Truxillo was yet leagues distant. As the road plunged down among the green woodlands through which it wound, he enjoyed the cool shadow which the tall chestnuts cast over the otherwise hot dusty road, which shone glaring and white in the rays of the meridian sun.

A faint chorus came floating on the breeze towards him as he rode along, and swelled out into a bold and merry strain on his nearer approach. The cracking of whips and jingle of innumerable bells announced a train of muleteers, who came in view a few seconds afterwards, and gave a boisterous cheer at sight of the scarlet uniform. According to the custom of the muleteers during hot weather, they all wore large cotton handkerchiefs, knotted round their heads, under their sombreros; their tasselled jackets were flying open, and their broad shirt-collars, stiff with flowers and needlework, were folded over their shoulders, displaying every bare and brawny neck. The train halted, and Ronald recognized his old acquaintance, Lazaro Gomez, the master muleteer, who took off his beaver with one hand, while he reined-in the leading mule with the other. Lazaro's speculations appeared to have been successful. His jacket was now of fine green velvet, covered with tinsel lace and garnished with about six dozen of those brass bell-buttons with which the muleteers are so fond of adorning their garments.

"Well, Micer Lazaro," said Stuart, "why do you drive your cattle so fast during the heat of the day, when they should be enjoying a *siesta* under the greenwood? They are likely to drop before you reach the forest of Jarciejo."

"*Par Diez!* I hope not, senor," replied the muleteer, in evident trepidation at the idea. "They shall reach Jarciejo,—we are ruined else; and I trust, in this perilous time, that the gracious senora, our Lady of Majorga," crossing himself and looking upwards, "will not forget the honest muleteer, that never passed her shrine without bestowing on it a handful of maravedis. She will put mettle in the legs of his mules, and enable them to save his hard-earned goods and chattels."

"How, Micer Gomez,—what is the matter? You seem much excited."

"*Santissima Casa!* is it possible that you know not the reason, senor? *El demonio!* I thought you had ten thousand British at your

back. The whole country round about is in possession of the French, and hard work we have had since we left Truxillo to escape being plundered of every maravedi. And only think, senor, what a loss I should have suffered! Why there are thirty skins of the best wine of Ciudad Real on the black mule,—*Capitana*, we call her,—she takes the lead; as many skins of the olive-oil of Lebrija, the best in Spain, on the pad of the second,—*Bocaneyra*, or 'the black muzzle,' as we name it."

"The French—the French at Truxillo!" exclaimed Ronald, in astonishment. "Where, then, is Sir Rowland Hill with his troops?"

"On his march for Merida, senor; and by this time many a league beyond Villa Macia. On the third mule—*Castana*, we name her, from her colour, there are twenty arrobas of corn from the Huerta of Orihuela,* all for the nuns of Santa Cruz, and worth in reals—"

"Are the enemy in great force hereabouts?" asked Ronald, who felt considerably concerned for his own safety.

"Truly, senor, I know not; but their light cavalry are riding in every direction. Some say that Marshal Soult, and others that the Count D'Erlon, has entered Estremadura, and that the British are all cut to pieces."

"That I do not believe."

"Nor I;—no, by the bones of the Cid Campeador, 'tis not likely. But as I was saying, senor, twenty arrobas of corn—"

"Twenty devils! Halt, Micer Lazaro; if you stay to tell over the inventory of your goods, you are not likely to escape the claws of the enemy, a party of whom I see on the top of the hill yonder."

A volley of curses broke from the muleteers at this intelligence. A party of cavalry in blue uniform appeared on the road, descending an eminence at some distance, and the glitter of their weapons, as they flashed in the sun, was seen between the branches of the trees. Crack went the whips.

"*Ave Maria—demonios—par Diez!* we are plundered and ruined!" cried the mule-drivers, as they lashed their long-eared cattle into a trot. "The rich oil, the wine and corn—*carajo!*—to be pillaged by the base French! But what is to be done? Were they under the roof of the Santissima Casa, which the blessed angels brought from Galilee to Loretto, they would not be safe. Forward, Capitana! gallant mule, sure of foot and long of wind. Hoa, Pedro de Puebla! keep up your black-muzzled sloth; we will flay its flanks with our whips else. Farewell to you, senor! Our Lady del Pilar aid us! we are in a sad pickle." And off they went, without farther ceremony, at their utmost speed, running by the side of their mules, and lashing them lustily, leaving Stuart looking steadily at the advancing party of horse, but dubious what course to pursue.

He could not stoop to have recourse to a deliberate flight; and as the enemy was between him and his friends, it was necessary to elude them by any means. Reining back his horse, he withdrew beneath the cover of a thicket beside the road. He was scarcely ensconced among the foliage, when about twenty *chasseurs à cheval*, with their short carbines resting on their thighs and their

* The fertility of Orihuela has become a proverb among the Spaniards: "Whether there is rain or not, there is always corn at Orihuela." *Llueva, o no llueva, trigo en Orihuela.* An arroba is a measure containing a quarter of a hundred-weight.

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officer riding in front, wheeled round a corner of the road, and passed his place of concealment at an easy pace. As soon as they were hidden by the windings of the road and the heavy green foliage which overshadowed it, Stuart emerged from his cover, and continued his route at a hard gallop towards Truxillo, which, however, he determined to avoid by a detour, in case of falling in with more of the French. He had not ridden a quarter of a mile, before a sudden angle of the path, which now passed under the cool shade of several vine-trellises, brought him abruptly face to face with two French officers, whose horses were trotting along at a very ambling rate. On seeing him, they instantly drew up, while their faces assumed an expression of unmeasured surprise. They were not above twelve yards distant. Ronald likewise drew his bridle, and unsheathing his sword, reconnoitered the Gauls, between whom a few words passed. One was a pale and thin man, in a staff uniform embroidered with oak-leaves. He carried his right arm in a black silk sling. The other was a dashing officer of cuirassiers, a man of singularly fine and muscular proportions; he was mounted on a powerful black war-horse, and wore a high brass helmet, with the Imperial eagle on its crest, and a plume of black horse-hair floating over it. He was accoutred with a bright steel cuirass and back-plate, and leather jack-boots which came above the knees. Both wore splendid epaulets and aiguillets, and were covered on the breast with medals and military orders of knighthood, —indeed there were few French officers who were not so.

Ronald saw at a glance that the heavy dragoon would be his opponent, and he felt some unpleasant doubts as to the issue of a conflict with a practised cavalry officer, and one thus sheathed in a panoply of steel and leather, while he himself had nothing to protect him from the blade of his adversary but his thin regimental coat and tartan plaid.

The officer with the wounded arm moved his horse to the road-side, while the cuirassier twirled his moustaches with a grim smile, and unsheathed his glittering weapon—a species of long and straight back-sword, worn by the French cavalry, and desired Ronald imperiously to surrender without striking a blow.

"*Rendez sans coup férir, Monsieur Officier.*"

Finding that he was not understood, and that Stuart prepared to defend himself, he reined his steed back a little way; and then dashing his spurs into its flanks, came thundering forward at full speed, shouting "*Vive l'Empereur!*" with his long blade uplifted, intending to hurl his adversary into eternity by a single stroke. But Stuart, by an adroit management of his horse's bridle, made a *demi-volte* or half-turn to his left, at the same time stooping his head till the plumes of his bonnet mingled with the mane of his horse, to avoid the Frenchman's sweeping stroke, which whistled harmlessly through the air; while he in return dealt him a back-handed blow on the crest of his helmet as he passed him in his career, which at once tumbled him over his horse's head and stretched him senseless in the dust, while his sword fell from his grasp, and broke in a dozen pieces. Elated with this sudden and unlooked for success, Ronald brandished his claymore aloft, and rushed on to the next officer; but drew back and lowered the point of his weapon, on perceiving the startled and indignant look of the veteran, who held up his wounded arm.

"Pass on, sir!" said Ronald, substituting Spanish for French, of which he scarcely knew above a dozen words. "I might, if I chose,

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make you prisoner; but I wish not to take advantage of your being wounded. Pass on, sir; the road is open before you."

The Frenchman appeared to understand him imperfectly, but raising his cocked hat, he prepared at once to take the benefit of the permission.

"Adieu, Monsieur de Mesmai!" said he, on passing his fallen comrade, adding something in a whisper, fragments of which only reached Ronald.

"*Malheurs, mon ami—à la guerre—comme à la guerre—retournez et reprenz-vous—chasseurs à cheval,*" and he galloped off. Ronald was half tempted to ride after and cut him down, and thus securely stop his intention of returning with the twenty light horsemen, as he supposed he meant to do, for the disjointed fragments he had heard implied an understanding between them.

"*Ah, la malice du diable!*" cried the cuirassier, as he endeavoured to rise.

"Come, Senor Cuirassier," said Ronald in Spanish; "I believe I am to consider you a prisoner on parole?"

"*Diablement!*" muttered the Frenchman, rubbing his sore bones.

"Come, to horse. Get into your saddle, and without delay. Do not imagine I will parley here long enough to permit your cunning old comrade to bring up the light dragoons to your rescue."

The Gaul still delayed to move, declaring that so severe were his bruises, he was unable to rise.

"Monsieur," said Ronald sternly, placing his hand in his basket-hilt, "I believe you not; 'tis a mere trick! And if you do not instantly mount, I shall be tempted to try if that iron harness of yours is proof against a stab from such a blade as this."

Thus angrily urged, the cuirassier with a sullen look, and some trouble evidently, mounted his horse, gave his parole of honour, and tossing the flints from his pistols, threw away with a curse his empty scabbard, and prepared to follow his captor, who inquired about his hurts and bruises with a frank kindness, to which the other replied by cold and haughty monosyllables; and his displeasure appeared to increase, when Ronald, instead of continuing on the Truxillo road, struck at once across the country to make a detour, thus cutting off any chance which the Frenchman had of being rescued by the chasseurs, should his companion bring them back for that purpose. Stuart was secretly well pleased at the capture he had made, and doubted not that the French *capitan* would make a very timely peace-offering to Cameron, who would be the reverse of well-pleased at his long absence.

"Cheer up, Monsieur de Mesmai,—I think your friend named you De Mesmai," said he; "there is no use in being cast down about this *malheur*. Such happen daily to our brothers in arms, on both sides. And it is a wonder our cases are not reversed, when my opponent was so accomplished a chevalier."

De Mesmai twirled his black moustaches, shrugged his shoulders till his epaulets touched his ears, and made no reply,—but gave an anxious glance behind them.

"'Tis no use looking for your friend and his *chasseurs*; they will scarcely find us, since we are so far from the main road. So, I pray you, give yourself no further concern about them."

To this taunting injunction, the Frenchman answered only by a stern military frown. He was a man above forty years of age, and his figure was a model of combined strength and symmetry. Exposure to the

sun had turned the hue of his face to something between deep red and dark brown,—the former was particularly apparent in a deep scar across the cheek, which he endeavoured to hide by the curl of his moustache. He appeared to view his captor with any feeling but a friendly one; indeed it was galling, that an accomplished cavalry officer like himself should have been unhorsed and compelled to surrender by one whom he regarded as a raw soldier,—a mere stripling; but, as his head had good reason to know, a very stout one.

"And so Monsieur de Mesmai is your name?" observed Stuart, endeavouring to lead him into conversation. "Surely, I have heard it before."

"'Tis not unlikely, monsieur. I am pretty well known on both sides of the Pyrenees; and permit me to acquaint you, that it was no common feat of yours to unhorse me as you did to-day. But as for my name, it has made a noise in the public journals once or twice. You may have heard it at Almarez,—I commanded in the tower of Ragusa."

"I now remember; but it was not very kind of you to cut the pontoon, and thus destroy the retreat of D'Estouville and his soldiers."

"Charity begins at home. You know that vulgar adage,—strictly English I believe it is," retorted the cuirassier haughtily. "*Sacre bleu!* 'tis something new for a French officer to be schooled by a British, in the rules of military honour."

"Nothing new in the least, sir!" retorted the other in the same tone of pique. "Military honour! What think you of the poisoned balls, which our troops say yours use so freely?"

"*Sacre nom de Dieu!*" exclaimed the cuirassier, hoarsely, while his cheek grew absolutely purple; "'tis false, monsieur; I tell you 'tis false! 'Tis a lie of the base mercenary German Legion, or the rascally Portuguese. Surely British soldiers would never say so of Frenchmen? Think you, monsieur, that we, whose bayonets have flashed at Austerlitz and Jena—think you, that we now would have recourse to means so foul? *Sacre!* to poison our bullets like the cowardly Indians,—and now, at this time, when under Heaven and the great Emperor's guidance the rustle of the banners of France have shaken the world to its centre? I trow not!"

"It has been rumoured by our soldiers, however; but I rely too much on the honour of Frenchmen, to imagine that they would resort to such dastardly means of maiming an enemy."*

"Monsieur, were we otherwise situated, I would put this matter to the sharper test of cold iron," replied De Mesmai, who was much ruffled at the mention of the poisoned balls; "but a time may yet come, and for the present I accept your apology. As for the story of the poisoned balls, doubtless you are indebted for it to the base Germans—mercenary dogs! whom their beggarly princes and little mightinesses sell by thousands to fight the battles of all nations."

"In our service we have a legion of several thousands, and they are excellent troops."

"Monsieur, we have many legions. But the German is without chivalry or sentiment, and fitted only for the mere mechanical part of war. They fight for their daily pay: honour they value not; to them 'tis as moonshine in the water—an unsubstantial glitter."

"You are severe, Captain De Mesmai."

"I cannot speak of them in more gentle terms, when I remember

* At one time a report was current among the Peninsular troops that the French used poisoned balls; but it was a malicious story, without any foundation.

that all the German prisoners you take from us invariably change banners, and enlist in your service. Several battalions have been raised among the Scottish military prisons of late. And these Germans—bah! But to the devil with them!"

"By the bye—who was your friend, with his arm in the sling? An officer of some rank, evidently?"

"Truly he is. I am glad you did not take him instead of me. Ah, monsieur, you have outwitted yourself confoundedly. What a prize he would have been to present to your general! That officer was Monsieur le Comte D'Erlon."

"D'Erlon!" exclaimed Ronald; "would to Heaven he would return."

"With the sabres of twenty *chasseurs à cheval* glittering behind him?"

"No, certainly. But oh! had I only guessed his rank and fame, he should not have escaped me. I would either have taken, or cut him down in his saddle."

"That would have been a pity, for he is a famous old fellow; but it would have left the comtesse a widow, with I know not how many thousand livres in the year. I know she looks with favourable eyes on me,—but, *sacre bleu!* 'tis all in vain. I don't like ladies that are verging towards forty years."

"You seem to have recovered your equanimity of temper now."

"Oh, perfectly; but my head rings like a belfry, with that cut you gave me."

"So that old officer, with his arm slung, was really the famous D'Erlon, of whom we have heard so much?"

"The gallant old count himself. He received a stroke from a spent pistol-ball a day or two past, which disabled his sword-arm; otherwise you would have had an encounter with him also."

"I shall ever curse my thoughtlessness, in having permitted him to escape."

The cuirassier laughed exultingly.

"I am—*diable!* I *was* his aide-de-camp; and we had merely crossed the Tagus last night with a sub-division of chasseurs, to make a *reconnoissance;* and we were returning leisurely in the rear of our party, when you so unluckily fell in with us, like some wandering knight-errant."

"Excuse me, monsieur; but as I perceive that your sabre-tache* is very full of something, if you have any of the Count D'Erlon's despatches or papers, I must consider it my duty to request that you will entrust them to my care."

"Excellent, by the bomb! That you may present them to your general?"

"Undoubtedly, monsieur."

"I believe he is every inch a true soldier; and were he here, would be welcome to share the contents of my sabre-tache; but as he is not, we will divide them honestly at the kettle-drum head. Here, you see, is a roast fowl, famously stuffed with sage and garlic, which yesterday afternoon I carried off from the dinner-table of a fat canon of Torbiscoso, when just about to carve, and very much aghast the padre looked when I seized it unceremoniously. Here also is a bottle of *pomard*,—rare stuff, as you will find. I took it out of D'Erlon's holsters not

* A leather case hanging to the waist-belt of a dragoon. It is meant for carrying military papers.

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above four hours ago. He always keeps a bottle in one, and a pistol in the other. A knowing old campaigner, *ventre St. Gris!* And now, since you have reminded me of the sabre-tache, let us to luncheon."

The pomard and the fowl were shared together, and had any stranger beheld them as they jogged along, he would never have imagined that they had been engaged in mortal strife an hour before.

"Ah, this horrible garlic! the taste of it would madden a Parisian *chef de cuisine,*" observed De Mesmai. "I drink to the health of senor, the reverend canon of Torbiscoso, who has provided for us this especial good luncheon. Come, my friend, you do not drink; you are as melancholy as if you had lost your love, while I am as merry as if I had just buried my wife. But why should I be cast down in spirits? The old count cannot do without me, and will soon get me exchanged; he might as well lose his head as Maurice de Mesmai. I save him a world of trouble by drinking his wine, smoking his cigars, making up his despatches, in which I take especial care that my name is always duly commended to the notice of the Emperor. I study the localities for camps, and always make them in the neighbourhood of convents. A-propos of convents: I love better to capture and seek them than anything else. 'Tis such delightful hide-and-seek sort of work, to pull the fair garrison from the nooks and niches where they hide from us. I have had a score of nuns across this very saddle-bow; and, but for your cursed interruption,—excuse me, monsieur,—would by this time have had the abbess of the Jarciejo convent. An immensely fine creature, upon my honour, with a neck and bust beautiful enough to turn the heads of messieurs their eminences the cardinals. A glorious creature, in fact, and as kind a one as may be met with on a long day's march. I had marked her for a prize, and D'Erlon had never dared to say me nay; otherwise he would have had to provide himself with another aide."

De Mesmai seemed to have recovered that buoyancy of temper so natural to Frenchmen, and he chatted on in this gay and unconnected manner, and sung snatches of military and tavern songs until they arrived, when evening was approaching, at Villa Macia, where it was necessary that they should halt for the night. Here they received information that Sir Rowland Hill, with the troops returning from Almarez, had passed through two days before. In so small a village there was no alcalde to order them a billet, and no inn at which they could procure one otherwise; and while standing in the street, irresolute how to act, they were surrounded by a crowd of swarthy villagers, who greeted Ronald with many a hearty *viva!* but regarded the disarmed Frenchman with louring looks of hatred and hostility, to which he replied by others of defiance and contempt. *El cura,* the rector or curate of the place, a reverend-looking old churchman, with a bald head, a few grey hairs, and a wrinkled visage, approached them with his shovel-hat in his hand, and invited them to partake of the shelter afforded by his humble roof, to which the Gaul and the Briton were alike welcome. The horses were accommodated in an out-house behind the cottage, while the curate introduced his guests into his best apartment,—a room floored with tiles, which had just been cooled by the application of a water-sprinkler. Nets of onions, oranges, and innumerable bunches of grapes hung from the rude rafters of the roof, waving in the fresh evening breeze which blew through the open window. Drawings of various kinds, particularly landscapes, adorned the

walls of the room, in which, if poverty was everywhere apparent, there was an extreme air of neatness and cleanliness, not often to be met with in houses of such a class in Spain.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CURATE'S STORY.

"Loose me, sire! and ill betide thee!
Curse upon thee! let me go!
Wert thou other than my father,
Heavens! I would smite thee low!"
The Cid: a Spanish Romance.

"*Te Deum laudamus!* we shall have a rest at last!" exclaimed De Mesmai. "I thought I had forgotten my Latin; and yet my old rogue of a tutor rubbed it hard into me with a tough rod." He clattered through the room with his heavy jack-boots and jangling spurs clanking on the floor; and seating himself in the curate's easy-chair, stretched out his legs, and half closing his eyes, contemptuously surveyed the place. He threw his heavy casque on the table, crushing the leaves of a large bible, which *el cura* had been reading.

"*Diable!* my head is ringing like a kettle-drum with the violence of that unlucky stroke. Monsieur, the basket-hilts of your Scottish regiments are confoundedly heavy, and their fluted blades give most uncomfortable thrusts," said De Mesmai, passing his hand over his round bullet head and thick and black curly hair, which clustered around a bold high forehead. His features were very handsome, strongly marked, and classically regular. Campaigns in Italy had bronzed and scarred them in no ordinary degree, and there was a bold recklessness in his eye and a fierceness in the curl of his moustaches, which seemed quite to appal the poor old curate, notwithstanding the presence of Ronald Stuart. "*Vive la joie!* let us drink and be merry. I am a prisoner of war—*sacre!* a prisoner! 'Tis something new; but thanks to D'Erlon, and madame his dear little countess, who will never be able to mount horse without me, I will not be long so. *Vive la joie, Monsieur le Curé—Senor Cura*—or what do you style yourself among the rebels of Joseph Buonaparte—what are we to have for supper?"

"*Gaspacho*—only a dish of *gaspacho;* 'tis all I have to offer you, *gracios senores.*"

"*Soupe maigre*, by the Lord! Bah! *senor Espagnol;* 'tis food only for hogs or yourselves, not for a cuirassier of France."

"'Tis all that France and misfortune enable me to offer. They have brought me low enough," replied the curate meekly, while he appeared astounded by the boisterous behaviour of the dragoon, for whom Ronald (though secretly angry at his conduct) endeavoured to apologize, and to re-assure their kind host. "But something else may be added to the *gaspacho*, senores, and you will find the latter very good; my grand-daughter is the best preparer of it in the village."

Diable! your grand-daughter? what a merry monk you have been in your young days. But how came you, *senor curé*, to have a family?"

"I was married before I took upon me the scapulary and girdle—

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the badges of my holy order," replied the other, while the colour came and went in his faded cheek, and he regarded the Frenchman with a fixed look of indignation, which was replied to by a contemptuous laugh.

"A jolly monk! *Vive la joie!* And is your grand-daughter young and pretty? I hope so, as I feel ennui creeping over me in this dull dungeon. But be not angry, reverend *curé*. Let us have but a measure of decent wine to wash down this same *gaspacho*, and we shall manage pretty well."

"If monsieur knew that I was his countryman," said the curate gently, "he might perhaps treat my grey hairs less insultingly."

"Not a whit, monsieur renegade!" cried the cuirassier fiercely. "What! you are some base emigrant, I suppose. They are ever the bitterest enemies to the great Napoleon, to his faithful soldiers, and to *la belle France*."

"'Tis false, rude soldier!" said the old man, his faded eye kindling up. "*We* are the only true friends to beautiful France, and the outraged house of Bourbon."

"Beelzebub strangle the Bourbons! Get us our supper, and call a halt to your chattering. Also, take care how you give me the lie, old gentleman, or I swear I will dash—"

"Hold! De Mesmai," said Stuart, interfering now for the second or third time. "I, as a British officer, cannot permit you to persist in insulting a Spanish citizen thus—"

"A dog of an emigrant! I have mown them down by troops—never yet granted quarter, even to their most pitiable entreaties. DEATH! was the word wherever we have fallen in with them—in Holland, Flanders, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. When I served with the army of the Moselle, we once formed a thousand emigrant prisoners into solid squares, and poured in volleys of grape and musketry upon them; while the cavalry charged them by squadrons, sword in hand, to finish by hoof and blade what the fire of the platoons had left undone."

The curate clasped his hands and turned up his eyes, but made no reply.

"You have little cause to boast of that exploit," said Ronald; "but Monsieur de Mesmai, we have been very good friends on the way hither, yet we are likely to quarrel, if you abuse our kind host thus." At that moment the curate's grand-daughter entered, and stole close to his side. The two officers rose at once, each to offer her a seat, and she took Stuart's, bowing coldly to De Mesmai, who, seating himself in what he thought a fine position, muttered, "A dazzling creature, really. Upon my honour, beats Mariette of the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs quite, and will make amends for the loss of the abbess." He raised his glass to his eye, and scanned the poor girl with so intent a look, that her face became suffused with blushes. She was indeed a very beautiful creature. She was about twenty years of age; her eyes had a blackness and brightness in them truly continental. Her teeth were perfectly regular, and of the purest white, and the fine proportions of her figure were displayed to the utmost advantage by a tight black velvet bodice, with short sleeves, adorned with frills of lace at the elbow, below which her white arm was bare. Her luxuriant black hair was plaited in two gigantic tails or braids, which hung down to the red flounce attached to her brown bunchy petticoat, which was short enough to display a well-turned foot and ankle.

During supper innumerable were the fine things and complimentary

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speeches which the cuirassier addressed to the Senora Maria, to all of which she listened with a calm smile, and made such careless yet appropriate replies, as showed that she knew their true value, and which sometimes confounded the Frenchman, who thought to win her favour thus; while he altogether lost the curate's by his insolent remarks and sneers at their humble repast—the *gaspacho*, a mess made of toasted bread, water, a sprinkling of vinegar, spices, salt, and oil, to which, as a second course, to De Mesmai's great delight, was added a dish of stewed meat. After supper the curate rose, and, laying aside his skull-cap, delivered a long prayer, which De Mesmai pronounced to be confoundedly tedious, and for which he showed his contempt by humming "The Austrian Retreat," and drumming on the table with his fingers.

A few stoups of the common provincial wine were now produced, and while discussing these, the curate engaged Stuart in a long conversation about Scotland, in the affairs of which he appeared to be much interested, like a true French priest of the old school. His father, he said, had served in Fitz-James's horse, under the illustrious Prince Charles Stuart, in the campaigns of 1745-6. He spoke also of the famous Scottish wizard, Sir Michael Scott, of Balwearie, Escotillo, as the Spaniards name him. Ronald knew little more about this ancient Scottish philosopher than what he had acquired from the "Lay of the Last Minstrel," published a few years before, and was not very well able to answer the interrogations of the curate, who produced from his little book-case a musty old copy of Sir Michael's "Commentary on Aristotle," published at Venice, A.D. 1496, a prize which would have thrown the Society of Scottish Antiquarians into ecstasies of delight, could they have laid their hands upon it. The curate informed Ronald that there was a countryman of his, a Padre Macdonald, who resided in the town of Alba de Tormes, and who had formerly been a priest in the Scots College of Douay,—when a scream from Senora Maria interrupted him.

While Ronald and his host were conversing, the young lady had been explaining the subject of some of her drawings to the dragoon, who bestowed upon them all, indiscriminately, such vehement praise, that the poor girl was sometimes quite abashed, and considered him a perfect connoisseur, though in truth he knew not a line he saw. But he seemed quite enchanted with the young provincial, his companion. "*Vive l'amour! ma belle Marie,*" he whispered; and throwing his arm around her, kissed her on the cheek. Her eyes filled with fire, she screamed aloud, and breaking away from him, drew close to the side of the curate.

"How, monsieur! how can you be so very rude?" exclaimed the old man, rising in wrath. "Do you dare to treat her as if she was some *fille de joie* of the Boulevards or night-promenades of the iniquitous city of Paris?"

"By the bomb! I believe the old gentleman is getting quite into a passion," replied the other, coolly twirling his moustache. "*Marie, ma princesse*, surely you are not so? The women are all devilish fond of me. When I ride in uniform through the streets of Paris, the sweet *grisettes* flock to the doors in hundreds. Marie, or Maria—"

"Insolent!" exclaimed the curate. "By one word I could avenge her, and overwhelm you with confusion and dismay."

"*Peste!* cried the astonished cuirassier, into whose head the wine he had taken was rapidly mounting; "that would indeed be something

new. Overwhelm me with confusion? me, Monsieur de Mesmai, by the Emperor's grace and my own deserts captain of No. 4 troop of the 10th cuirassiers? *Diable!* that would be something rare, and rarities are agreeable. Maria, *ma belle coquette*, come to me, and say that you are not angry. Meanwhile, *Monsieur le Curé*, I should be glad to hear that terrible word."

He advanced again towards Maria Rosat; but Ronald, who was now seriously angry, interposed between him and the terrified girl.

"Shame! shame on you, Captain de Mesmai!" said he. "This conduct shows me how outrageously you soldiers of Buonaparte must behave on all occasions towards the Spaniards, and that the excesses recorded of Massena's troops were not exaggerated in the London newspapers."

"Massena is a fine fellow, and a soldier every inch," answered the other tartly; "but let us not come to blows about a smatchet like this,—especially as you, monsieur, have the advantage of me. You are armed and free; I am weaponless and a prisoner on parole. But, Monsieur Stuart, I meant no harm. In a soldier-like way, I love to press my moustaches against a soft cheek. No harm was intended, and *ma belle Marie* well knows that."

"Ah, Monsieur Maurice—" began the curate.

"Ha! Maurice?" interrupted the cuirassier sharply. "How came you, old gentleman, to know my name so well?"

"Insolent and libertine soldier!" replied the curate sternly, "I knew not if I should tell you. I would,—I say again I can confound and dismay you as you deserve to be."

"A rare blockhead this! rare, as one would meet in a march of ten leagues. Do so, in the devil's name, Sir Curate; but as for Maria—"

"Name her not, base *roué!* She is—she is—"

"*Tête-dieu!* who is she, most polite monsieur? A princess in disguise?"

"Your daughter,—your own child! Maurice de Mesmai of Quinsay," replied the old priest with solemn energy; while the dark features of the cuirassier became purple and then deadly pale, and his eyes wandered from the faces of Ronald and Maria to the calm features of the curate, whose arm he grasped, as, with emphatic sternness and in a tone something very like consternation, he answered,—

"My daughter? Impossible! What have you dared to tell me, old man?"

"Truth, truth! as I shall answer to Heaven, when all men shall stand at the tribunal to be judged on the great day which is to come. I tell you truth,—she is your daughter."

"Her mother?" asked the dragoon, bending forward his dark eyes, as if he would look searchingly into the very soul of the curate. "Her mother—"

"Was Justine Rosat,—the lily of Besançon."

"Poor Justine!" exclaimed the other, covering his face for a moment with his hand. "And, Monsieur le Curé, you are—"

"François Rosat, her father, and grandsire of this poor orphan."

"What! the gardener at my jovial old château of Quinsay, on the banks of the Doubs? Impossible! he was destroyed when I blew up the hall, with all the base republican mechanics who filled it."

"Monsieur, I am he," replied the curate.

Maria, with her hands crossed on her bosom, knelt at the feet of De Mesmai weeping bitterly, and imploring him, if he was really her father,

to speak to her, to look upon her. But the devil-may-care spirit of the true Parisian *roué* and libertine was not at all subdued: he turned from her to Ronald, who had been listening in silence and wonder.

"Ah! Monsieur Stuart," said he with a laugh, "I have been a sad fellow when a subaltern. *Tête-dieu!* what would old D'Erlon and his countess think of this?"

"Noble senor," said the kneeling girl, in a soft plaintive voice, "ah, if you are indeed my father, speak to me;" and she pressed his hand between her own. "Father, hear me!"

"Father! *ma belle*. Very good, but something new when addressed to me, and sounds odd. How D'Erlon and his plumed and aiguletted staff would laugh at this! Maurice de Mesmai of the 10th cuirassiers,—the most dashing aide-de-camp in the Imperial service, to be father of a little Spanish *paisana*. By the bomb! you do me infinite honour. What a very odd adventure! And so, monsieur, my old rebellious gardener escaped the explosion at Quinsay? Excellently planned affair that was! Hand me wine: thank you. Really, 'pon honour, this respectable title of father has in it something very overpowering."

He quaffed a long horn of the wine, which had already begun to cloud his faculties, and he endeavoured by talking in his usually careless manner to hide the confusion that he evidently felt. Maria, who had shrunk from his side, wept bitterly, and covered her face with her hands.

"*Diable!*" said the cuirassier, turning round. "'Tis horrible wine this. Ah! for a single glass of Hermitage, Château Margot, Vin Ordinaire, Volnay, or glorious Champagne, such as old Marcel retails at the Eagle on the Quai d'Orsai, opposite to the Pont Royal, in our good and glorious Paris. But what is the girl weeping about? You should rather laugh, having just found your father, and found him as handsome a fellow as ever stood in jack-boots. All the girls are in love with me—'pon honour they are. Some of the fairest creatures at the court of the Empress are dying for me; and I mean to act the part of a heard-hearted dragoon, and let them die if they will. I swear to you, Maria, by a thousand *caissons* of devils, that as you appear just now, with your lashes cast down, and your face covered with tears and blushes, like the western sky in a shower, you are pretty enough to turn the brain of monsieur the Pope, to whom I drink that he may have a long and joyful life. But I must retire. My head is buzzing anew with that sword-stroke. *Diable!* my gay helmet, what a dinge you have got. But, messieurs, we will talk over these matters in the morning, when I suppose we shall leap to saddle without blast of trumpet. Adieu! mademoiselle, my daughter; pleasant dreams to you. *Vive la joie—tête-dieu!*" He took up his heavy military cloak and staggered out of the room, withdrawing to the humble attic set apart for himself and Ronald. A long pause ensued.

"There, he has gone with the same swagger as of old—the polished gentleman, the accomplished and gallant soldier, combined with the blustering tavern-brawler and the libertinism of the perfect *roué*. He is all unchanged, although twenty years have passed into eternity since I beheld him last," said the curate, in a mournful accent; "and yet, when I remember what he was, I cannot—no, I cannot implore a curse upon him. I carried him in my arms when he was an infant, and he is the father of this poor weeping girl. Alas! from the day that as a stripling soldier he first buckled on a sword-belt, time has wrought no change upon him. He is the same daring and gallant, but reckless and hollow-hearted man as ever."

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"Senor Cura, to me this has been a most incomprehensible scene," said Stuart; "so much so, that I trust you will not consider me impertinent or inquisitive in wishing for an explanation."

"Quite the reverse,—an explanation is, indeed, necessary. But retire, Maria, my poor cast-away; I will speak to you of this afterwards. Be seated, monsieur, and draw the wine-jug towards you."

He led Maria from the room; and on returning, seated himself at the table and commenced in the following words:—

"*Monsieur officier*, I am, as you already know, a Frenchman, a native of the fertile district of Besançon. I succeeded my father in the humble occupation of gardener to the family of this Monsieur Maurice de Mesmai, at the castle of Quinsay, a noble château, built on the banks of the Doubs, which flows through Besançon. The château is of venerable antiquity, and it is said to have been granted to an ancestor of De Mesmai's by Charles Martel. Ah, monsieur! when I had only my flower-beds and vineries to attend to, no man was happier than I—François Rosat. With my flowers, my wife and daughter were my sole delights; and when I returned in the evening, after working during the hot dusty days in the garden of the château, what pleasure was mine to be met by my smiling Suzette, with the little laughing Justine in arms, stretching out her hands and crowing with delight at the *bouquet* of violets and roses I always brought her from my choicest beds. And merrily we used to spend our evenings, for Suzette sung while I played second on the flute, and we taught little Justine to dance as soon as she could walk. My life was all humble happiness then, monsieur; but it was not destined to continue long so. Justine was just sixteen when my wife died; and our old lord dying soon after, this sad *roué*, Monsieur Maurice, came to take possession of the château, and terrify the poor peasantry by the wickedness he had learned in Paris and the garrison towns where he had been stationed: he belonged to the dragoons of Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul. This dissipated Maurice, arrayed in all the extreme of Parisian dandyism, the first Sunday we saw him in church, formed a strong contrast to our venerable old lord his father, who used to occupy the same pew so devoutly, dressed in his old-fashioned way of Louis the Fifteenth's days,—his deep waistcoat, silk coat, with its collar covered with powder, and his ruffles and frills starched as stiff as pasteboard; and we soon discovered that if there was a difference in their appearance, there was an equal difference in their hearts and sentiments.

"My little Justine had now become a woman, and a very beautiful one—more especially so for the daughter of a peasant. She was the belle of the rural district, and the people named her the lily of Besançon. Ah, monsieur! although the child of a low-born man, a vassal, she was surprisingly beautiful; too much so to be happy, as my friend Pierre Raoul told me more than once. Her figure was not the less handsome or graceful, because, instead of satin or brocade, she wore our homely brown stuffs; and her long black curls, flowing in freedom, seemed a thousand times more beautiful than the locks of high-born ladies, powdered and pasted into puffs and bows by the hands of a fashionable barber.

"Monsieur, I perceive that you almost comprehend my story, ere it is told. My daughter was charming, and our lord was a libertine. In that sentence are the causes of all my woes. I was kept in a constant state of anxiety lest the debauchee, our young lord, or some accomplished rascal of his acquaintance, might rob me of my treasure—for

such she was to me; and what I had dreaded came to pass at last. I had observed that the manners of Justine were changed. She shunned the villagers, and often went out alone; she seldom laughed, and never sang as she used to do; but was ever moody and melancholy, and often I found her weeping in solitary places.

"Never shall I forget the evening when the dreadful truth broke upon me, with all its maddening anguish; when I was told that my daughter was lost,—that the bloom of the lily was blighted! I was no longer François Rosat,—no longer the same man apparently; a cloud of horror seemed to have enveloped me, for although but a poor peasant of Besançon, I held my honour as dear to me as Louis XVI. could have held his. One evening I returned to my cottage, bearing with me a basket of choice flowers for the decoration of Justine, who had been elected queen of a fête which was to be given by the villagers and tenantry of Quinsay on the morrow. I returned to my home, monsieur,—a house which was to be no longer a home for me. Justine was not awaiting me, as usual, under the porch, where I had trained up the honeysuckle and woodbine,—nor was she in our sitting-room; but she could not be far off, I imagined, as her guitar and work-basket lay on the table. I know not how it was, but I noted these little matters anxiously, and I felt my heart beat quicker, as if in dread of coming evil.

"'Justine!' said I, laying down my basket, 'come hither. You never saw such flowers as these for freshness and beauty, and I have been employed the whole day in culling them for you. Here are anemonies, crimson and lilac, and blue and white pinks, carnations, gillyflower, auriculas with eyes of scarlet edged with green, violets as large as lilies, and tulips and roses such as were never before seen in Besançon. Justine! come here, girl. Why, where are you?' But no Justine answered my call. Her little room, the room in which her mother died, was deserted, and my heart swelled in my breast with an inward presentiment of evil, as I went forth to seek her by the river side. Here I met the steward of Quinsay, Pierre Raoul, a surly fellow, whose addresses she had rejected. He informed me, with what I thought a grin of triumph and malice, that my daughter, with Monsieur Maurice, had just swept through Besançon in a travelling-carriage, and were off for Paris as fast as four horses could take them. As he spoke, the earth swam around me, and I saw his lips moving, although I heard not his conclusion; there was a hissing sensation in my ears,—the cords of my heart felt as if riven asunder, and I sunk on the turf at the feet of Pierre.

"When I returned to consciousness, he was bathing my brow and hands in the cool water of the river; but he soon left me, and oh! monsieur, what a sense of loneliness and desolation came upon me. That my daughter should desert me thus heartlessly,—that the little creature I had cherished in my bosom should turn upon me and sting me thus! I raved like a madman, and tore the hair from my head and the grass from the earth in handfuls. When this fit passed away, all was silence and stillness around me: the moon was shining brightly in the sky, and silvered the boughs of the trees my own hands had trained, and the petals and buds of the flowers that it had been my delight to attend; but they were unheeded now, and I turned to where appeared, in the strong light and shadow, the old château de Quinsay, with its battlemented towers and elevated turrets. I prayed deeply for my erring Justine, and implored Heaven and the spirit of her mother to sustain

me under so heavy a dispensation. I would rather have seen the child of Suzette laid dead by her side, than the dishonoured mistress of Maurice de Mesmai. But my prayers were impious, as I mingled them with the bitterest maledictions upon her accomplished seducer. At the château the servants, some with pity, some with the malice felt by little minds, corroborated the blasting information given me by Pierre Raoul, and that very night I set out for Paris in pursuit of my lost sheep. I set out on foot on my sorrowful pilgrimage, almost heart-broken, and without a sous to defray my expenses by the way. How I reached the capital—a distance of two hundred and thirty-five miles from Besançon—I know not. But He who fed the children of Israel in the desert surely assisted me by the way. How great was my misery, when begging as a miserable mendicant, exposed to the insults of the *gens d'armes*, I wandered about that wide wilderness of Paris, with the vague and eager hope of recovering Justine! Once—yes, once—I got a sight of her; only a single glance, but one I shall never forget. In a dashing carriage, the panels of which flashed in the sun with gilding and armorial bearings, she was seated by the side of De Mesmai, tricked out in all the gaudy and wanton finery that wealth and pride could bestow upon her. But she looked paler, less happy than she was wont to be, and the roses had faded from her cheek, and the lustre from her once sunny eye. They swept past me on the Boulevards, where I was seeking alms as was my wont, and Justine, *mon Dieu!* my own fallen but kind-hearted daughter, threw a demi-franc into my tattered hat, without looking upon my face. I attempted to cry out; but what I would have said expired on my lips. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, and when I recovered, they were gone! I never beheld them again.

"I was starving at that moment, monsieur; food had not passed my lips for three days, and I looked wistfully, till my eyes became blinded with tears, upon the little coin I had received from Justine. A sudden thought struck me. I spat upon it, and tossed it from me as a coin of hell, as the wages of her infamy. Twelve months,—long and weary months of wretchedness and sorrow, I wandered about the streets of Paris, a woe-begone mendicant, until all hope of seeing her again was extinguished, and I returned to Besançon more heart-broken, if possible, than when I had left it. My cottage had fallen into ruin; but honest Pierre Raoul restored me again to the occupation of gardener, and repaired my old residence for me. Our lord had been absent, no one knew where, ever since he had carried off Justine, and I began to have some faint hope that he might have married her.

"These thoughts stole at length like sunshine into my desolate heart; and I thought so much of the chances and probabilities, that at last it appeared to me to be beyond a doubt that Justine was the wife of De Mesmai. I plucked up fresh courage, and attended from dawn till sunset my loaded orchards and blooming flower-beds as of old. The garden was again my delight and glory, and not even does the great Napoleon survey his troops with more delight, than I did my beds of tulips and anemonies: I had brought to perfection the art of cultivation, and where can it be practised with more success than under the climate of my own beautiful France? In the garden of the château, the aloe of Africa, the pine of Scotland, the oak of England, the cypress of Candia, the laurels of Greece and Portugal, the rose-tree of Persia, the palms of India, the figs of Egypt—all blooming together, and at once.

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"In my application to my old business, the manifold miseries I had endured in Paris were forgotten, or at least subdued in my remembrance. I pictured bright images of monsieur's returning, with my beautiful Justine to be mistress of his château. But these were doomed soon to end. One evening I sat on the turf-seat at my door, employed as usual building castles in the air, while I made up and dried packages of seed which were never to be sown by me. It was a beautiful summer evening, and all the fertile landscape seemed bright and joyous in the light of the setting sun. Clear as a mirror, the river murmured at my feet, sweeping past the old château on its opposite bank, where, above trees a hundred years old, the slated roofs of its turrets and gilded vanes were shining in the sun. Afar off, between openings in the trees of the lawn, could be seen the fortifications of the citadel and city of Besançon, with its round towers and the tall spires of its colleges and churches reared against the cloudless sky. I desisted from my employment and took off my hat, for the sound of the evening service came floating on the wind towards me from the rich abbey of the order of Citeaux. The very air was filled with perfume, for the breeze swept over the wide orchards and gardens of the abbey and château.

"We French are enthusiastic creatures, monsieur; and I was filled with delight and ecstasy at the beauty of the evening and the scenery of my native place, where the deep blue river wound among fertile hills, vineyards, and green woods between happy little hamlets clustering round ivy-clad churches and the stately châteaux of the old nobility of France,—a nobility, monsieur, in those days not less proud and haughty than those of your own northern country.

"'Yes,' said I aloud, giving utterance to my thoughts, 'the hand of fate has been in all this. Justine will certainly be the lady of Quinsay, and poor old François Rosat will get a corner in some part of that huge old château to rest in. Let me see, now: the octagon turret which overlooks the orchard will suit me exactly. It has a window to the south, which overlooks the garden. Excellent! I can watch the buds and blossoms in spring.—I will look at them the moment I leap from bed; but, alas! I must not do more. I shall then be a gentleman, and Monsieur François Rosat, father-in-law of the lord of Quinsay, must not be up with the lark, like Maître François the gardener,—that would never do. This red nightcap I will exchange for a hat of the best beaver, tied up with a silver loop, *à la* Louis XVI.—My coat—'

"The train of my vain but happy thoughts was cruelly cut short by the apparition of a woman standing before me. Her appearance declared her to be sunk to the lowest ebb of misery and degraded destitution. She was tanned by exposure to the weather; bare-headed, bare-footed, —almost without covering, and bore in her arms a poor child, almost as wan and meagre as herself. *Ah, mon Dieu!* how keenly at this distant time can my memory recall the agony of that terrible recognition. Oh, what a moment was that! Disguised as she was, I recognised her; but a mist overspread my vision, and I felt her fall into my open arms, although I could not for some minutes discern her.

"'My father! oh, my father!' said she. But, alas! her voice was not so sweet as of old.

"'Justine, I forgive you,' was my answer. 'Come again to my bosom: the past shall be forgotten.'

"She sunk down between my knees upon the earth, and lay motionless and still. Monsieur, I will not protract this intrusive story of my

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griefs. She was dead! she had expired at that moment—the kindness of my forgiveness had killed her! Unrequited love, unkindness, sorrow, shame, and misery had wrought their worst upon her,—she was destroyed! De Mesmai had taken her to Italy, and there, ruthlessly abandoning her for some new victim, she was left to find her way as she best could to Besançon, to place in my charge the infant to which she had given birth on the way. The child of De Mesmai is the Maria to whom he behaved so insolently to-night. Two days afterwards the poor polluted lily of Besançon was laid in her mother's grave; and as I strewed the fresh flowers on the green turf which covered her, I knelt down upon it and solemnly swore a vow,—a vow at once terrible and impious,—to seek revenge upon her destroyer.

"I joined one of those secret bands, or societies, then so numerous in France, composed of men who were desperate by their characters and fortunes, and the sworn enemies of kings and of nobility. I longed for desperate vengeance, and the hour for glutting it seemed at hand. A bloody standard was soon to wave over France, and destiny had pointed out that, like your own Stuarts, the Bourbons were a doomed race. The spirit of revolution and destruction was soon to sweep over my country, blighting and blasting it like the simoom of the African desert; and, eager as I was for vengeance on De Mesmai, I hailed the approaching tumult with joy, and entered into the wildest schemes of the most savage republicans and heaven-daring atheists. So eagerly did I attend the taverns of Besançon to hear the news from Paris, that the little innocent confided by Justine to my charge was quite neglected. My garden became a wilderness; I became sullen and morose, and forgot even to hang fresh flowers, as had been my custom daily, on the grave of Justine.

"About six months after her return, the once dreary château was filled with sudden life and bustle. Monsieur Maurice had returned, bringing with him a number of wild and reckless fellows like himself. These were all officers of his own regiment, except one very sad dog, worse even than the rest, Monsieur Louis Chateaufleur, captain of the *Gens d'armes Ecossois*, or first troop of the French gendarmerie. Nothing was heard of now but feasting, drinking, and desperate gambling within the château: hunting, hawking, shooting, frolics, and outrages of every sort committed out of it. The guests of De Mesmai were some of the wildest roués about Paris—and the mess of the Duc de Choiseul's regiment had produced many of them,—and a great commotion their appearance made in Besançon and the rural district of Quinsay. All the lamps in the former were sometimes broken in a single night, and the whole city involved in darkness, while these madcaps and their servants possessed themselves of the steeples, where they rang the alarum-bells backwards, and rushed through the streets, crying 'Fire! murder! robbery and invasion!' until the peaceable citizens were scared out of their seven senses.

"Nor were their brawls and outrages confined to the night alone. The wig of Monsieur le Maire was dragged off and flung in his face, when he was passing through the Rue de l'Université. Swords were drawn in the lobbies of the theatre every night, and the gens d'armes were always beaten and insulted. Monsieur Chateaufleur, of the *Gens d'armes Ecossois*, as a crowning outrage, carried off by force to the château a young milliner, or grisette, of the Rue de Paradis; and the citizens of Besançon were enraged beyond what I can describe at the insolences of these young aristocrats, who were at once struck with

terror and dismay when news arrived of the revolution which had broken out in Paris, and of the bloody tumults which had ensued there. De Mesmai armed his servants, and the inhabitants of the château kept close within its walls.

"The same wild spirit of uproar and anarchy that prevailed at Paris seemed also to pervade the provinces, which appeared suddenly in a state of insurrection, the people of France seeming to consider their allegiance to Louis XVI. at an end. The spirit of dissatisfaction had spread to the troops. Those in garrison at Besançon laid down their arms, and abandoned the citadel to the bourgeois, who, on becoming thus suddenly armed, assumed the *cocade de la liberté*, and, wearing this republican badge, committed the most frightful outrages. No dwelling, sacred or profane, escaped sack and pillage; no age, or rank, or sex did we spare, executing indiscriminately, by the musket and sabre, all who opposed us. Burning for vengeance against the family of De Mesmai, I had associated myself with and become a leader among the republicans. We ruined the city of Besançon, giving its public buildings, its schools, and university to the flames. Alas, monsieur! deeply at this hour do I repent me of the part I bore in these desperate outrages. We compelled the proud nobles to acknowledge that they had lost their privileges, and we burned to the ground their office of records in the city. We sacked and utterly levelled the rich abbey of the Citeaux,—that place made so famous by the animadversions of Voltaire. The young and beautiful Princess de Baufremont, and the Baroness d'Andelion, who dwelt there, owed their escape from our fury to the interposition of Heaven and the chivalric gallantry of Louis Chateaufleur, who, with two of the *Gens d'armes Ecossois*, cut his way through us, sword in hand, and carried the noble demoiselles off on horseback. Flushed with success, excitement, ferocity, and the wines found in the vaults of the rich old abbey, we became absolutely frantic, and some, imbruing their hands in each other's blood, slew their comrades; while others daubed themselves with gore or black paint, to make themselves more hideous. Eager for more plunder and devastation, we cried out to, or rather commanded, our leader, the ungrateful Pierre Raoul, to lead us against the stately old château of Quinsay, that its aristocratic guests might be given up to our vengeance. With the dawn, De Mesmai was roused from his bed by the beating of drums, the braying of horns, discharge of fire-arms, the yells, the howls, the shrieks of the frenzied rabble, mingled with shouts of '*Vive la nation! Vive la liberté!* Perish the name of God and the king! Freedom to France! Long live Monsieur Beelzebub!' and a hundred other mad and impious cries. The gay lord of Quinsay, and his comrades of Choiseul's horse, beheld, to their no small terror, the gardens, the orchards, and parks in possession of a desperate mob, armed with bayonets, muskets, pikes, scythes, and every weapon they could lay their hands on—iron rails and fences where nothing else could be procured. All were full of wine and frenzy: many were only half-dressed, blackened with smoke and dust, and besmeared with blood, presenting a frightful troop of hideous faces, distorted by the worst and wildest of human passions.

"You may imagine the surprise of Pierre Raoul and his worthies, when, at the gate of the château, we were met by Monsieur Maurice and his gay companions, bowing and smiling, gracefully waving their hats, while they greeted us with cries of 'Long live the nation! Long live the sovereign people! *Vive le diable!*' We were astonished, and greeted them with the most tremendous yells, while a hundred black

and dirty hands wrung theirs in burlesque friendship. The whole band were formally invited to a repast, served up in the hall of the château, from which De Mesmai had hurriedly torn down all the banners and armorial bearings of his house, substituting in their place an immense tri-coloured cockade, that was fastened to the back of the chair of state, in which the insolent Pierre Raoul installed his ungainly figure. Many now strode about, daring and unrestrained intruders into the very hall where they had often stood as humble dependants, trembling and abashed in the presence of De Mesmai, who had been, in the neighbourhood of Besançon, a much greater man than Louis XVI. was at Paris or Versailles. At the hastily-prepared feast with which he entertained us, we ate and drank of everything, gorging ourselves like savages as we were. The richest and most expensive wines in the cellars of the château were flowing at our orders like water. Pipes and puncheons were brought up by dozens and madly staved, until the floor swam with crimson, purple, and yellow liquor, to the imminent danger of those who lay upon it in a state of exhaustion or intoxication. 'Wine! wine!' was the cry, and the contents of well-sealed flasks of Lachrymæ Christi and Côtéroti were poured down our plebeian throats like the commonest beverage. We ordered all sorts of things, beating and insulting the unoffending servants of the château until they fled from us; and the noise and uproar in the hall, crowded as it was to suffocation with armed and intoxicated madmen, became stunning and appalling.

"A hundred times I had resolved, by a single thrust of my pike, to sacrifice De Mesmai to the shade of Justine; but the hourly massacres I saw committed by my barbarous comrades had glutted my longings for vengeance, and when I remembered that De Mesmai was the father of Justine's little girl, my fierce resolution relented. As often as I raised my hand to stab him to the heart, my soul died within me,—and he escaped. Very great however was our surprise at the condescension of this once proud noble, and the gay chevaliers his companions; and while doing the honours of the table, we subjected them to a thousand mortifications and gross insults. We tore the lace and facings from their uniform; transferred their epaulets from their shoulders to those of Pierre Raoul and our leaders; tossed wine in their faces, and fully tried their patience to the utmost limits of mortal endurance; but dire and unheard-of was the vengeance they were meditating!

"While we were thus rioting in the ancient hall, chosen servants of De Mesmai were placing barrels of gunpowder in the vaults immediately beneath it. When all was prepared, our host withdrew, and one by one his guests followed him, and left the château unperceived.

"The train was fired,* and the mine sprung. Never shall I forget the expression I read in the faces of the republicans at that moment,—the last of their existence!

"We heard beneath our feet an appalling roar—a noise as if the globe was splitting asunder. All looked aghast, and I cried aloud on that God to help me, whose existence I had denied a moment before; but the unfortunate wretches around me had scarcely time either for prayer or blasphemy. The pavement heaved beneath their feet; the massive walls trembled and sunk inwards; the stone arched roof descended thundering on their devoted heads,—all was darkness, chaos, and indescribable horror! Of a thousand men who crowded the place, not one escaped save myself: all were buried in the ruins,—the masonry

* For an account of this affair, see any French paper or Journal for July, 1789.

of a whole wing of the château covered them. Yes, monsieur, I alone escaped that terrible explosion. By Heaven's grace, rather than my own deserts, I happened at the instant to be standing in the recess of an oriel window, and was blown into the garden, where, when my senses returned, I found myself lying safe and whole on my favourite tulip-bed.

"De Mesmai and his friends had fled to some place at a distance, where they took shipping for Britain. Messieurs the bourgeois were exasperated to madness at the explosion of Quinsay. They rose *en masse* in arms, and the noble old château was razed almost to the foundation, and all the castles in the neighbourhood of Besançon shared the same fate. The populace were even under less restraint than before, and committed excesses, inconceivable to those who beheld them not, under the banner and sacred name of *liberty*. The National Assembly offered a reward for De Mesmai's head; but he was safe in London, and the British government refused to give him up. Afterwards, when Louis was no more, and the silver lilies of old France were trodden as it were to the earth, De Mesmai made his peace with his countrymen by some means, and fought as a private soldier in the battles of the Republic. He distinguished himself, and has now, in this noonday of French heroism, risen to the rank of a captain of cavalry under the Corsican usurper,—this self-made emperor, who usurps the crown and sceptre of a better race,—a race now exiled, and finding a refuge in the capital of Scotland. Napoleon has restored to De Mesmai his estate of Quinsay, and as he is a favourite both with the court and army, he may yet become a marshal of the Empire.

"Of myself, I have little more to say, monsieur. Taking with me my grand-daughter, the little Maria, I abandoned Besançon, the scene of such tumult and disorder, and wandered I know not why, or how, across the Pyrenees into Spain, where, as I had received a good education in my youth, I was admitted as a brother into the order of *los Capuchinos*, at Truxillo, and soon afterwards received the situation of curate here,—at this peaceful little hamlet, Villa Macia, where, for fifteen years past, I have dwelt in retirement and happiness. Although the memory of my wife and unfortunate daughter is not effaced, time has, in a great measure, softened the pangs I feel when thoughts of them occur to my mind.

"I now consider myself a happy and contented old man. My parishioners, my books, and the fair young girl my grand-child, have been the companions of my increasing years. But I am soon to be deprived of my merry and volatile Maria. A very noble cavalier of Truxillo, Don Gonzago de Conquesta, has not disdained to sue for and obtain the promise of her hand. They will soon be wedded, and I am to perform the happy ceremony.

"This is all my tale, monsieur, in elucidation of the singular scene you saw acted here this evening. I trust I have not wearied you in this sketch of my life: although an humble one, it has been full of sorrows. I never thought again to have recalled them so fully to my mind; but the unexpected appearance of their author under my roof has rolled back the tide of years to the hour in which we first met—I knew the fine and noble features of his race the moment he laid aside his helmet. But I will not detain you longer from rest, monsieur. Take another cup of this simple wine, and permit me to bid you, as we say here in Spain, *Buenos noches*—Good night."

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CHAPTER XXX.

AN ARREST.

"Guerre et pitié ne s'accordent pas ensemble."
French Military Proverb.

THE next morning by daybreak Ronald and his prisoner quitted Villa Macia.

The young Scot was disgusted with the levity and carelessness with which, at their departure, De Mesmai treated the tears and sorrow of his daughter, and the pious admonitions of the reverend *cura*.

"Body o' the Pope!" said he, as they cantered under the shade of the cork-trees which lined the road, "what a rare blockhead has become monsieur my old gardener, now curate of Villa Macia. How D'Erlon and his aiguletted staff would laugh, if they knew I had become quite a family man! I am always apprehensive that some of my wild pranks will come unluckily to light, as this affair of poor Justine Rosat's has done; but I am too old a soldier to be put to the blush. Blush! I have no blood to spare—the bleeding of twenty years' campaigning has cured me of that. How the poor girl wept! What the deuce! surely she did not expect me to take her with me? Captain Maurice de Mesmai, of Monsieur le Compte d'Erlon's staff, with a family! *Corbœuf!* the idea is most excellent! 'Tis well Victor d'Estouville and our first major, Louis Chateaufleur, know nothing of this; otherwise they would quiz me out of the service. However, I commend my daughter to the long-visaged and noble cavalier, Don—Don—what the devil is his name?—Gonzago de Conquesta; and vow, if he makes not a good husband, affectionate father, and displays not all the good qualities you will find graven on every great man's tombstone, I will crop his ears—I will, by the name of the bomb! Ho, ho! now when I remember it, what a long roll-call Monsieur le Curé made of my early scrapes, last night. I listened to him through a chink in the partition. *Tête-dieu!* how impertinent the old dog was. I own to you I was on the point of cutting short his exceedingly rude harangue a dozen times."

De Mesmai kept talking thus for an hour at a time, without heeding the interruptions of Ronald, who did not hesitate to acquaint him freely with the opinion he entertained of his feelings and sentiments, at which the other only laughed in his usual loud and boisterous manner.

At San Pedro they were received into the house of the alcalde, who showed them every attention and civility. But there an unlucky brawl ensued. De Mesmai, probably to spend the time, paid such close attention to the *patrona*, a plump, rosy, and good-natured-like matron, that the worthy alcalde, her lord and master, started up from the supper-table in a sudden fit of jealousy and rage, and would have stabbed the cuirassier with a poniard, which he suddenly unsheathed from his boot—a place of concealment often used for such a weapon in Spain. Ronald's timely interference quelled this dangerous brawl, and mollified the fierce merchant, for the alcalde was a retailer of Cordovan leather; and Stuart was very glad when he had his troublesome companion once more out on the highway, where his pride and petulance had less opportunities of rousing the ire of the fiery Spaniards.

Near Medellin, a town twenty miles east of Merida, their horses suddenly became dead lame; and Ronald, who was chafed to fury at the delay caused by this accident, lost much more time, as he could not abandon the major's horse, and it could proceed but slowly. Next day, the ninth of his absence, he beheld before him the massive amphitheatre, the Gothic spires and well-known bridge of the old Roman city, which was associated with so many sad and tender reminiscences of Catalina, a thousand recollections of whom came crowding into his mind, plunging him into melancholy, from which De Mesmai vainly endeavoured to rouse him by an animated description of the follies and the gaiety of Paris, and biographical sketches of the reigning beauties, with all of whom he was, by his own account, a decided favourite.

It was dark when they reached the bridge, on the centre of which, where the blown-up arch was crossed by wooden planks, they saw two Highland sentinels pacing at their post, the flutter of their plaids and waving folds of their kilts giving to them the appearance of a couple of those ancient Romans who had often kept watch and ward upon the same spot. On hearing the sound of the approaching hoofs, they came to their front, and one challenged, in the familiar voice of Evan Iverach, "Stand! Who goes there?"

"*Ronald an deigh nam fiann*" (the last of his race), answered Stuart in Gaelic, almost laughing.

The two astonished Highlanders set up a loud skraigh, which startled the very leaves of the olives on the other side of the Guadiana, and ringing under the arches of the bridge, died away in the winding rocks of the river.

"Who is the officer on guard here?" asked Ronald, after Evan's extravagant joy at his sudden appearanc ehad somewhat subsided.

"Mr. Macdonald, sir."

"Which? We have six or seven.'

"Lieutenant Ronald Macdonuil, sir. The guard-house is close by the first barricade ye'll find cast across the croon o' the causeway, just inside the yetts o' the toon."

Promising to satisfy to-morrow the eager and affectionate inquiries of Evan, who hung on at his plaid very unceremoniously, Stuart, with his prisoner, crossed the bridge; and entering the city-gate, found Macdonuil's guard under arms, having been startled by the holloa of the two sentinels.

"Where are the colonel's quarters?" asked Ronald of the officer on duty, when congratulations had ceased.

"Next door to the town-house; you will easily know it,—a large building with a portico. But I would advise you to defer reporting your arrival until to-morrow."

"Why so, Macdonuil? The sooner so much the better, surely?"

"But Cameron is sure, from the direction in which Campbell said you left Almarez, that you were not in the hands of the enemy; and he is strangely enraged at your singular absence."

"Singular? How! have I not explained to you—"

"Oh, perfectly; I am quite satisfied. But, my dear Stuart, Cameron is such a fiery sort of fellow, that he will not be so easily pleased, notwithstanding your having captured this French officer. You must prepare yourself for something disagreeable, as he is determined to put you under arrest; and it will not put him in a better humour to report your return just now, almost at midnight."

"You are right, Macdonuil. But what shall I do for a billet?

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Twelve o'clock,—there is the bell-clock of the corporation-house striking."

"We have established a temporary mess-room, and you had better go to it; our fellows are all there still, I have little doubt,—they are never in a hurry to break up. You know the Calle de Guadiana—"

"Lying between the river and the Plaza?"

"Yes. Pass down there, wheel to your left, and you will come to the chapter-house of the San Juan convent, where our temporary mess-house is established."

"But I shall probably find Fassifern there; and if anything disagreeable—"

"There is no danger. I saw him at sunset return to his billet in the Calle de Santa Clara, accompanied by his faithful esquire and orderly, Dugald Mhor; so he is without doubt housed for the night."

Ronald followed Macdonuil's directions, accompanied by De Mesmai, who had been so often in Merida that he knew the streets as well as an inhabitant could have known them. On reaching the foot of the street of the Guadiana, the lights shining through the tall traceried windows of the chapter-house, together with the unseemly sounds of midnight roistering and merriment which issued from it, informed them that this was the place they sought.

"Here we dismount," said Stuart; and alighting, they tied their bridles to the necks of two stone saints, whose weather-beaten heads had for six hundred years sustained the weight of a canopy over the Gothic doorway. Before entering, Ronald gave a glance through a window, between the thick stone mullions of which he took a survey of the company. The gloomy old chapter-house was but indifferently lighted by a dozen yellow old commissariat candles, stuck on the heads and hands of corbelled saints and angels, shedding a dull and uncertain light on the table, which was composed of a few rough boards nailed together. Around this rude contrivance sat about thirty officers in the Highland uniform, occupying the high-backed oaken chairs which erst were used by the holy fathers of San Juan, when assembled in solemn conclave. Ronald saw that nearly all his brother officers were present, as few were on guard, and there was not one married man among them.

The general equipage of the table was different from that of a home-service mess, and contrasted strongly with the rich uniforms of the carousers, who were drinking Spanish wine from horns, tin canteens, glasses, and all sorts of vessels fit for the purpose that could be procured.

"*Corbœuf!*" exclaimed De Mesmai, "what a jovial song,—more merry than musical, though. I have a dozen minds to strike up the Marseillais hymn."

"Stay,—hearken a moment."

They were singing a well-known Scottish song,* and one which had become so popular at the mess, that it always followed the standing toast of "Here's to the Highlandmen, shoulder to shoulder!" and was chorused in a most methodical manner. By the noisy accompaniments of glasses clanked upon the table, and heels upon the floor, it was evident the company were pretty mellow. Some of the windows being open for the admittance of cool air, the bold chorus, chanted by

* "Donald Macdonald:" a song composed in 1803 by the Ettrick Shepherd, to the tune of "Wooed, and married, and a'."

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thirty voices, rolled out into the still night air, and echoed among the deserted streets:

"Sword, and buckler, and a',
Buckler, and sword, and a';
For George we'll encounter the devil,
Wi' sword, and buckler, and a'."

Now Campbell's loud sonorous voice, chanting alone, awoke the echoes of the place:

"The Gordon is gude in a hurry;
And Campbell is steel to the bane;
And Grant, and Mackenzie, and Murray,
And Cameron, will hurkle to nane.

"The Stuart is sturdy and wannel,
And sae is Macleod and Mackay;
And I, their gude brither, Macdonald,
Sall never be last in the fray."

"Chorus again, gentlemen"—(and the thirty struck in)

"Brogues, and brochan, and a',
Brochan, and brogues, and a';
And up wi' the bonnie blue bonnet,
The kilt, the feather, and a'."

As the chorus died away in the aisles and cloisters of the adjacent church, the door was thrown open, and Ronald, leading his French friend, entered. All eyes were turned instantly towards them.

"Stuart! Stuart! Ronald Stuart!" cried twenty voices: but the light glittering on De Mesmai's helmet and breast-plate startled some so much, that their first impulse was to seize their weapons, and many a dirk and claymore were grasped in the expectation of seeing the room filled with Frenchmen. Those members of the company who were sober enough, rose from the table to welcome their newly-found friend; but Louis Lisle, taking his sword and bonnet from a stone saint who had them in keeping, abruptly withdrew.

"Introduce me, Monsieur Stuart," said the cuirassier, with a proud smile, "or by the bomb! we will have each other by the throat. Do your comrades thus welcome strangers, by baring sword and dagger?"

Ronald could scarcely get a word spoken as his brother-officers crowded round him, and a truly Scottish shaking of hands ensued; while a hundred questions were asked him by the sober in English,—by the less so in their more natural Gaelic, about his absence, and returning thus accompanied. It was impossible at that time to relate any particulars, so he determined on deferring all explanations until another time. Though angry at the conduct of Lisle, he was nevertheless much gratified by the friendly reception he met with from the other officers; but as he had no heart to partake in their carousal, he withdrew soon after (to the disappointment of all) with Alister Macdonald to his billet, until another could be procured from an alcalde. De Mesmai remained at the table, and soon established himself as the lion of the company, and although he spoke always in Spanish, or very imperfect English, he became a general favourite, and kept the mess in roars of laughter. Military topics were studiously avoided, but he talked in his usual style incessantly about duels and girls, brawls and debauches, strange adventures and French military frolics, until the morning drums beating *réveille* through the streets, warned the jovial party to

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separate; but I believe more than half of them took their repose on the pavement of the chapter-house, which had never before been the scene of such carousing.

Next morning Stuart completed his toilet hurriedly, with the intention of waiting on the colonel.

"Prepare yourself for something disagreeable, Ronald," said Macdonald, who was leaning over a window which looked out on the principal street leading from the Plaza to the river. "Claude A——, the adjutant, is coming here under the piazzas. He wears his sash and gorget, and I have no doubt Cameron has sent him to pay you a visit."

"I expected such; yet *the chief* is somewhat hurried."

"Take care how you style him so: I was nearly put under arrest for it at San Pedro. Come in!" cried Alister, as a smart knock was heard at the room-door.

"Sorry to spoil your breakfast, Stuart, by this early visit," said the adjutant, entering; "but Cameron has sent me for your sword, and desires me to say that you must consider yourself under arrest, until you can state satisfactorily in writing your reasons for absenting yourself for these nine days past without leave. He is in a towering passion; all the blood of Lochiel seems to be bubbling up in him, because you did not report yourself last night. I never before saw his eyes glare as they do this morning."

"Pshaw! Claude, you—"

"A fact, upon my honour. But do not be alarmed; he is too well pleased with your conduct at Almarez to carry this affair to extremities. I believe, but for that night's work, he would bring you to a court-martial *instanter*."

"The deuce he would! Do you think so, A—— ?"

"Of course. You know Cameron; there is not a stricter fellow in the service,—a regular martinet. But you had better take your pen, and endeavour to satisfy him by a sheet of foolscap. 'Tis well you left us so soon last night, as you will require a clear head this morning. Mine aches as if it would fall in pieces; but I mean to call at the wine-house; (you know the saying), 'to take a hair of the dog that bit me.'"

"A very strange fellow, the French cuirassier, Claude?" observed Macdonald.

"A hair-brained spark as ever I met with. He has played sad mischief with all ours. We shall not have one officer to each company on parade this morning. A dozen, I believe, are lying under the table with himself. Campbell, old Macdonald, and our most seasoned topers, were put to their mettle by him. But give me your sword, Stuart; the colonel is waiting for it, but I trust will not keep it long. You must endeavour to make your peace with him as soon as possible, and not be under any fear of being put in coventry by our mess: we know you too well to do that."

Ronald felt considerable chagrin as he beheld Claude A——, the adjutant, carry off his weapon, and found himself under arrest, and in imminent danger of being arraigned before a general court-martial. He composed himself to indite, for the colonel's perusal, an account of his absence, which he found a very delicate and difficult matter, as he was unwilling that the mess should get hold of poor Catalina's name to make it a subject of ridicule, and quiz him about it, which he feared

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would be done unmercifully, if he took not some stern means to stop them.

Nearly a quire of paper was expended before he could get a despatch worded to his own and Macdonald's satisfaction,—one giving as brief and concise an account as possible of his adventures, and declaring that the reason of his sudden departure from Almarez was to free the sister of Don Alvaro, of Villa Franca, from Cifuentes, the well-known bandit, who had accompanied the first brigade disguised as a priest. Evan was despatched with the letter to the colonel's quarters; whilst Stuart and Macdonald, accompanied by De Mesmai, went to visit D'Estouville, the unfortunate commandant of Fort Napoleon, who was dying of the wound he had received from the officer of the 71st.

An old chapel, situated near the Baths of Diana, had been appropriated as an hospital for those wounded at the forts of Almarez. The design of some Gothic architect when the art was in its infancy, it was a low dark building, with short clumsy columns, gloomy arches, enormously thick walls, and dismal little windows, between the thick mullions of which the grey daylight seemed to struggle to be seen. On the worn flight of steps ascending to the great door-way, lay a few dozen legs, arms, hands, and feet, which had been amputated and were lying there until the hospital orderlies were at leisure to inter them. During the last war, the reckless manner in which medical officers hewed off wounded limbs, without attempting to reduce a fracture, has been often reprehended. What a scene of multiplied human misery the interior of the chapel presented! The wounded soldiers, British and French, to the number of some hundreds, lay in ranks on the damp pavement, over which a little straw was thrown, as no bedding could be given them. Deep and hollow groans of acute agony and suffering sounded from many parts of the building, and the continual rustling of the straw announced the impatient restlessness of sickness and pain. Here lay the gallant and high-spirited conscript, brooding gloomily, and almost weeping, over those visions of glory, which the amputation of a leg had suddenly cut short; and there the stern grenadier of the Imperial guard lay coolly surveying his own blood as it trickled through the straw, and filled the carved letters of epitaphs on the pavement stones. Near him lay his conqueror, the British soldier, shorn of a limb, dejected and miserable, having nothing before him now but a "passport to beg," and the poor apology for a pension which grateful Britain bestows on her defenders, with the happy resource of starving in a parish workhouse. All were pale as death, and all disfigured by blood and bandages,—grisly, ghastly, unwashed, and unshaven. Often as they passed up the aisle, Stuart and Macdonald held the tin canteen to the parched lips of some wounded man, who drank greedily of the hot stale water it contained, and prayed them piteously to adjust his bandages, or by doing some little office to alleviate his pain. Some were dying, and lay convulsed among their straw, with the death-rattle sounding in their throat—expiring, unheeded and uncared for, without a friend to behold them or a hand to close their eyes; and as soon as they were cold, they were seized by the hospital orderlies,* and carried off for interment.

A wretched combination of misery, pain, and sorrow the interior of that little chapel presented, and it made a deeper impression on Stuart and Alister than on De Mesmai, who was an older soldier, and had

* Well-conducted soldiers, excused from duty to attend the sick.

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beheld, in twenty years' campaigning, too much bloodshed and agony to recoil at the sight of it there; but he loudly expressed his pleasure at beholding the attention paid to his countrymen. He saw that no distinction was made; the wounded of both nations received the same attendance from the medical officers and their orderlies: and more than one grenadier of *the Guard* allowed his dark features to relax into a grim smile, as his red-coated attendants held up his head, to pour down his throat some dose of disagreeable stuff.

"Ha! Stewart," said Ronald, catching his namesake the assistant surgeon by the belt as he was rushing past, with a saw in one hand and a long knife gleaming in the other.

"Don't detain me, pray. I have just clapped the tourniquet on that poor devil in the corner. I have to take his arm out of the socket, at the shoulder, too—a fearful operation: you'll hear his shrieks immediately. Sorry to hear you are under arrest. You will get through it, though, doubtless,—being a favourite."

"Where is D'Estouville, the French major; and how is he?"

"Near his last gasp, poor man. You need not go to him now, as he is dying, and troubling him will not lengthen his life a second. I could do nothing more for him, and so have resigned him to his fate. I must attend to our own people, whose lives are of more consequence,—every man being worth exactly twenty pounds to government, as you will see in—I forget what page of the 'Mutiny Act.'"

"How can you jest in such a horrid den as this? You surgeons are strangely cool fellows, certainly. But D'Estouville—"

"Is lying yonder at the foot of that marble monument. Do not trouble him now; he will be dead in five minutes.—Excuse me: I have to amputate a leg to prevent mortification, and its owner is growling and swearing at my delay."

Under a Gothic canopy lay the marble effigy of a warrior of the days that are gone. It was the tomb of one of the Villa Franca family. He was represented in armour, and lying at full length, with his hands crossed on his bosom. The canopied recess had been made a receptacle for the caps and knapsacks of dead men, which were, without ceremony, piled above the figure of the Spanish cavalier. A tattered pennon, a rusty casque, and a time-worn sword, hung over the niche, where a marble tablet announced it to be the tomb of the noble knight Don Rodrigo de Villa Franca:—"*Muerto en una batalla con los Moros, a diez de Noviembre, del ano de mil y viente y siete.*"*

In front of this ancient tomb lay D'Estouville. Alas! how much ten days of pain and suffering had changed the gallant young Frenchman! He was stretched on a pile of bloody straw, stripped to his shirt and regimental trowsers. A large bandage, clotted and gory, encircled his head, and his once very handsome features were sadly changed; they were sunken and hollow, pale and emaciated to the last degree. He lay motionless, with his eyes closed; but his lips were parted, and he respired through his clenched teeth with difficulty. His head rested on a knapsack, placed under it by an honest Irishman of the 50th, who lay on his left, smoking a short black pipe, while he surveyed, with a composed but rueful look, the stump of his right arm. On the other side lay a Gordon Highlander, quivering in the agonies of death: a shot had lodged in his breast, and he, too, had been given up as incurable by the medical officers. The agony he endured had brought on a

* "Slain by the Moors in battle, the 10th November of the year 1027."

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delirium; he was chanting, in low and muttering tones, a sad and plaintive Gaelic dirge,—probably the death-song of his race, and as his voice sunk and died away, the bold spirit of the Son of the Mist seemed to pass with it.

"*Morbleu!* poor Victor!" said De Mesmai. "Ah! messieurs,—surely he is not dead?"

At the sound of the French exclamation, D'Estouville opened his eyes, and attempted in vain to raise his head; but a faint smile of recognition passed over his pale features as he beheld Ronald Stuart, and gazed on the well-known uniform of De Mesmai. "Poor fellow!" continued the latter, while a tear glistened in his eye, as he knelt down and took the hand of Victor; "he is evidently far gone. Many a merry bout we have had together at old Marcel's, and many a midnight frolic with the girls and gens d'armes in the Rue de la Conférence; but these times have all passed now, and can never be again. Speak to me, my friend! How is your wound?"

"*Les malheurs de la guerre! Ah, De Mesmai, mon ami, les malheurs de la guerre!*" muttered the wounded man, and sunk backward on his miserable bed; then pointing to his head, he added, "*A mon camarade—blessure—où—où—plaie mortelle!*"

"They have brought me here, too, Victor, those cursed misfortunes of war; but my case is not so bad as yours. The helmet is a better defence than the grenadier cap against the straight-cutting blades of these fiery Scots. Cheer up, D'Estouville; while there is life, hope remains. You may yet lead the old Guard in the charge! the eagles of the empire may yet flap their wings over you."

"Never," whispered Macdonald; "his race of existence is over. Why, then, inspire him with false hopes of living longer?"

"He is one of those fellows that are very hard to kill. I know Victor," whispered the other in reply; then continued as before, "The Emperor has marked you for his own,—the whole service say so, D'Estouville, and suppose that your promotion will be as rapid as ever was Soult's, Macdonald's, Bernadotte's, or any other marshal's of the empire. Remember these things, *mon ami*, and never think of death."

"Death's cold hand is upon me. Ah! Maurice, how can I expect to conquer?"

"*Morbleu!* by determining to live, and to earn honour and fame in spite of him. Courage, my friend."

"No, no, De Mesmai!" replied D'Estouville, with that sudden life and energy which often animates the dying when the moment of dissolution draws near, while his pale cheek flushed, and a light sparkled in his sunken eye. "Honour and glory—these are the dreams of every Frenchman, and they once were mine, my constant thoughts, never for a moment absent from my mind. The very visions of my sleep were full of the gloss and glitter of military parade: martial honour was the idol of my heart. As a gallant young conscript when I left my native home at Lillebonne, as the hardened grenadier, as the dashing subaltern of the Guard, as a wretched prisoner pining in Scotland, and again as a free and daring soldier,—these high hopes, this proud ambition, never left me for an instant,—buoying and bearing me up under all the toils of war and misfortune, until I found myself stretched on the pavement of this chapel, a dying captive! Honour has faded away from me, and the proud sentiments which caused my heart to swell, to bound with

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rapture at the sharp roll of the drum, now animate me no more. Never again will drum or bugle sound for me!"

"You speak very sorrowfully, in truth," replied De Mesmai; "but some droning monk has been putting these notions in your head. Take care you do not exhaust yourself, *mon ami*."

"Ah, Maurice! a thousand times I wish I had fallen sword in hand at Almarez, rather than lingered here, enduring for these past ten days the extremes of mental and bodily agony. Yet had I only received a moment's warning, I question much if that officer of the Scottish chasseurs could have cut me down so easily."

"No. In truth you were an excellent swordsman, Victor—sharp of eye, and sure of hand."

"I trust, Maurice, you will not be long a prisoner. 'Twas a sad blank in my life, my captivity. Faith! *mon camarade*, I almost shiver at remembrance of the castle of Edinburgh. You will remember me to Louis Chateaufleur and the rest of your regiment; and do so particularly to my own, should you ever fall in with them on service." He spoke now with more difficulty, and at longer intervals. "Glory to France, and long life to the great Emperor! I trust he will think Major D'Estouville has done his duty. Almarez I defended to the last; and, Maurice, had you not cut the pontoon, we might have effected our retreat. The emperor would have saved four hundred soldiers of his noble old Guard."

"And your life, Victor."

"A mere bagatelle! I lay it down in his service."

"*Vive l'Empereur!*" cried some of his soldiers, who lay within hearing on their pallets of straw. The shout was taken up by many, and echoed through distant parts of the chapel. D'Estouville's eye flashed brightly; he waved his hand as he would have brandished his sword, and, exhausted with speaking, and the emotions which the gallant battle-cry aroused within him, he again sank backwards, and by the spasms which crossed his pallid features, they saw too surely that the moment of death was nigh. Again rousing himself from his lethargy, he beckoned to Ronald, who knelt down beside him.

"I would speak to you of Diane de Montmichel," he whispered, in tremulous and broken accents. "Her husband, Monsieur le Baron—de Clappourknuis—the letter I gave you at Truxillo; ah! *mon ami*, do you not understand me?"

"Indeed I do not, D'Estouville."

"The hand of the grim king of terrors is upon me; the sands of life are ebbing fast, and my voice will fail me soon. Monsieur le Baron—"

"Is released from the castle of Albuquerque, and has passed over to the French lines. Think not of these, D'Estouville."

"I—I would give you a message to Diane."

"Alas! how can I ever deliver it?"

"Find means, *croix Dieu!*" muttered he piteously. "Kneel closer to me. I depend on your honour, Monsieur Stuart. Diane—Diane—"

"What of her? Say—say, ere it be too late!"

But there was no reply. What the Frenchman would have said expired on his lips, and he fell back speechless on the hard knapsack which formed his pillow.

He never spoke again; but in a few minutes died, and without a struggle.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

DE MESMAI.

"Ah, me! how mournful, was, and slow,
With arms reversed, the soldiers come;
Dirge-sounding trumpets full of woe,
And, sad to hear, the muffled drum!"

John Mayne.

THE death-bed scene of poor D'Estouville, although it made on the witnesses of it a deep impression for the time, was easily passed over when the feelings are blunted and deadened by the continual excitement of campaigning. They had scarcely left the chapel or hospital, before the shade of sorrow which their faces had worn disappeared. Macdonald went away on some duty; Stuart's thoughts reverted to his arrest, and the disagreeable predicament in which he was placed; while De Mesmai began to talk in his usual light and careless style. He placed his scarlet forage-cap very much on one side, tightened his sash, arranging the tassels gracefully, and stuck his glass in his eye to ogle and scrutinize the females who passed.

"Poor Victor!" said he; "a merrier comrade or more gallant soldier than he was, there is not in the imperial service. Many a glorious evening we have had in Paris flirting with the *jolies grisettes* of the Rue des Trois Maries,—fighting with the gendarmerie, and amusing ourselves by frolicking with messieurs the good-natured bourgeois,—some dozen of whom we have ducked in the Seine. These days are all passed away, and poor Victor is gone to his long home. War leads to death or glory, and his fate to-day may be ours to-morrow; so, then, what is the utility of being cast down? *Vive la joie!* let us live and be merry while we can. Praised be our stars! here is a wine-house, where we can spend the evening in a jovial style, and scare away from our hearts the gloom cast upon them by the death of D'Estouville. *Diable! mon ami;* for what do you stare so at that old ruinous mansion?"

"'Tis the house of the Villa Franca family. I received great kindness from them, when I came to Merida for the first time."

"A picturesque ruin it makes, with its shattered capitals and empty windows. D'Estouville's grenadiers did all that. I have heard that he carried off a very pretty creature from this place, at least so Chateaufleur of ours told me. He had her at Almarez; but, like a cunning dog, kept her closely out of my sight, lest I might have procured her transfer to the tower of Ragusa, when I was left in temporary command. But we had plenty of girls there, by the Pope! We captured a score of plump young *paisanas;* but their skins were devilish brown, and their hands were all chapped with milking goats and cows. Here is the wine-house,—but, *morbleu!* I have not one infernal sous to clink upon another!"

"I have, *mon camarade,*" said Stuart, producing a purse containing forty duros, which he had borrowed from Major Campbell, to procure favour with whom he was obliged to endure two long stories about Egypt.

"*Sacre!* forty duros? A lucky dog and a most gorgeous display,—

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'pon honour—really. Enter then, and we will drink a long glassful to the continuance of the war."

From the wine-house they adjourned to the Prado, where they strolled about under the shade of the rich orange-trees, or lounged on the wooden sofas. De Mesmai smoked a cigar, and kept up, to use a camp phrase, a running fire of words, and laughed heartily at his own jokes; while Ronald listened in silence, and surveyed with feelings of mortification the regiment on its evening parade, from which for the present he was excluded.

"Fine fellows, these bare-kneed Celts of yours, Monsieur Stuart," said De Mesmai, as he knocked the ashes from his cigar. "A goodly row of most captivating brown legs they have. How pretty the waving tartan seemed, as the corps wheeled from open column into line. They call forth the admiration of the ladies too,—the delightful creatures! Really, 'pon honour, I think they peep more at the Scottish plaids and plumes, than at this smart uniform and bright steel bourgoinette of mine. A gallant chevalier your colonel is. He gives his orders with that firm tone of authority which marks the true, the bold-hearted soldier, and one born to command. A *soldado* of most goodly proportions is that long-legged field-officer, who last night bored me to death about Egypt, and his campaigns there. Body o' the Pope! look at that girl."

"Which?"

"With the black veil hung over the high comb. What a roguish black eye and most excessively attractive pair of ankles she has! I will speak to her. Ho! *ma princesse*—"

"Beware what you do, De Mesmai," interrupted Ronald hastily. "She is a lady, and one of rank evidently, by the lace embroidery on her stomacher and mantilla. Some officers of the 39th are with her, too."

"*Diable!* so I now perceive; and one of your savage Scotch chasseurs, I think."

"Savage!" repeated Stuart, dubious whether to laugh or frown. "He is an officer of the Highland Light Infantry,—that corps with the tartan trews, and bonnets without feathers. By Jove! 'tis Armstrong; the same officer who cut down poor D'Estouville at Almarez. He is flirting with this young lady, and recks no more of the deadly stroke he gave, than if he had killed a muircock. Let us move on. The Highlanders will march past this way, and I little like to be sitting here like an outcast from them,—and without my sword too, by heavens!"

"A prisoner of war,—*diable! Me voilà à votre service.* I will go with you wherever you please. But there are more girls congregated here, to see the troops on evening parade, than in any other part of this ruinous old city of Merida. In France they love, like the butterflies, to be in the sun; but here they promenade under the cold shades of the trees, or sail about beneath their gloomy damp piazzas. By the way, it has a most singularly picturesque effect, a tall graceful figure with a fluttering veil and floating mantilla gliding under these old arches; quite mysterious, in fact. Look, for instance, at that lovely creature with the auburn tresses. *Tête-dieu!* how I long to wheel that girl round in a waltz. Ha! there is a *rouge-et-noir* table not far from this, and a thought strikes me; I shall make my fortune to-night. Will you lend me a couple of those dazzling duros you showed me a short time ago?"

"Undoubtedly, and with pleasure."

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"*Vive la joie!* Come along, then. There is a gaming-house in the Calle de Ferdinando, kept by some officers of the Portuguese caçadores. Come with me, and I will show you how to break their bank, and carry off their glorious piles of duros and doubloons."

"I never gamble," replied Ronald; "and by the rules of our service 'tis strictly forbidden to do so, either in camp or quarters."

"Bah! *mon camarade.* If I had you within sound of the bells of Notre Dame, I would soon learn you to forget your northern prejudices."

Stuart's remonstrances and protestations were made in vain. The gay impetuosity of the Frenchman overcame them all; and while arguing about the matter they arrived at the door, where a board, painted red on one side and black on the other, announced that the *rouge-et-noir* table was kept there. A crowd of English, Portuguese, and German officers were pressing round the table, at the head of which sat the banker, a swarthy Portuguese officer of light infantry, with a long cigar in his mouth, and having heaped up before him several piles of dollars, doubloons, and British guineas,—all of which were rapidly changing hands at every turn of the red and black cards.

Stuart remarked that there was not a single Scottish bonnet in the room, and his national abhorrence of gambling caused him absolutely to blush at being there. He was disgusted at the wild eagerness, the intense anxiety, the bitter disappointment, fierce anguish, or cruel triumph which he witnessed in the features of the players. The two dollars De Mesmai had borrowed were soon added to the goodly pile which lay before an officer of the 39th; and urged on by the former, Ronald betted on several cards, all of which turned up fatally, and he had the mortification to behold every one of his remaining dollars swept across the table in quick succession, and coolly pocketed by a fierce-looking Spanish officer of De Costa's brigade, who evidently thought it no sin to gamble, although he wore on his left breast the enamelled red cross of Calatrava, a religious order of knighthood.* Ronald rushed away from the hell, feeling absolutely furious at his own folly and at De Mesmai, who, however, continued at the table, in hopes of borrowing from some one.

The lesson was not lost on Stuart, who, from that day until this, has never touched a card. But that night's play left him literally penniless, and in a strange city. He was ashamed to apply to any of his brother-officers, or expose his folly to them; and as Gordon, the regimental paymaster, had not received the arrears of pay, there was nothing to be hoped for from him. It was now dusk, and he was wandering among the groves of olive and willow that flourish by the sedgy banks of the Guadiana, and overhang its current. Here, while pursuing the narrow pathway by the river side, he was surprised by seeing the figure of Dugald Mhor Cameron, the colonel's private servant, standing at a short distance from him—a sure sign that Cameron himself was not far off.

Dugald Mhor (or big Dugald) was an aged but hardy Highlander, from the country of the Cameron, or the land of the great Lochiel on the banks of Loch Linnhe, among the wild, dark mountains of Lorn and Morven,—the Morven of Ossian. From these he came to follow the son of the laird through the continental wars, and he had been by the side of Cameron in every battle in which the corps had been engaged in Egypt, Denmark, Holland, Portugal, and Spain, and had been twice

* Instituted by Don Santio, of Toledo, in 1180.

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wounded,—once at Bergen-op-Zoom, and again at the battle of Alexandria, in Egypt. Dugald was nearly seventy years of age, yet his well-knit frame was strong and muscular as that of a horse, and his hair was white as snow; while his face was as dark as his tartan, by constant exposure to the weather.

With the broad blue bonnet over his thin white haffets, the heavy-belted plaid cast over his gallant breast, the dirk, the pistol, and the claymore dangling at his belt, his strong bare limbs, and the brass-studded Highland target slung on his shoulder, Dugald Mhor was the *beau-ideal* of the loyal old Jacobite of the 'forty-five;' that period when the star of the Stuarts, amid the last blaze of the true Scottish spirit, flashed forth but to vanish for ever. It need scarcely be added that old Dugald was a stanch Jacobite. He had witnessed the battle of Culloden, whither, as a sort of page or attendant gilly, he had followed Cameron of Lochiel. Since the day Fassifern left his home to follow the drum, Dugald Mhor had been to him a kind of standing orderly, friend, sometimes a governor, but always a leal true northern henchman, that would cheerfully have laid down his life, if by doing so he should have pleased his master.

When Stuart beheld this kilted vassal of the colonel's standing on the narrow path before him, he was sure that the latter could be at no great distance; a flush suffused his cheek, and he became confused at the idea of encountering so proud and fiery a man while lying under his displeasure. A turn of the path brought him in view of Cameron, who was just bidding adieu to Sir Rowland Hill. To avoid a rencontre now seemed impossible. The general rode off in the opposite direction, while Cameron advanced straight towards Ronald by the narrow footway at the river side.

"Well, Mr. Stuart," said he frankly; "this morning from my trusty Dugald Mhor I received and perused your long letter concerning your absence, for which I believe I must excuse you. It was a very unfortunate affair that of the Spanish lady's death; but every means must be taken to discover this rascal, Micer Cifuentes. How deeply you colour! I trust I have said nothing to offend? Ah! I comprehend the matter fully now, by your confusion. There was a great deal more in that letter than what met the eye, though it was very cunningly worded. But it will not do in these days, even in Spain, to ride to the rescue of every distressed damsel, and a knight-errant in a red coat is a strange anomaly. But I believe there was much more of love than chivalry in the affair; therefore, Stuart, I pass it over, as I trust it will never occur again."

"To that, colonel, I may pledge you my word of honour; one such adventure is quite enough for a lifetime."

"You are aware how far I might have carried this matter; for one who commands a Highland regiment, composed of such fiery spirits, and so different from the line generally, must be strict. Your absence has made a noise through the whole division, and I have just been making your peace with Sir Rowland Hill, who is very favourably disposed towards you, in consequence of the dashing manner in which you led the stormers on at Almarez, and for this last affair,—the capture of D'Erlon's aide-de-camp. How very unluckily the count escaped! He would have been a noble prize to have sent to Britain. The adjutant will send you your sword; and remember not to be restive at the mess, as it is probable you will be severely quizzed, the officers having

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heard of this Spanish donna, and got a version of the story very different from the real one."

That night Ronald returned to his billet with a lighter heart than he had felt since the death of Catalina. His trusty squire of the body, Evan Iverach, on learning the low state of his exchequer, pressed upon him a purse of dollars, which he had carefully saved up from his pay, with the intention of purchasing a silver-mounted set of pipes for his father Donald, the old piper at Lochisla. Ronald, with much reluctance, took the money as a loan, Evan vowing if he did not, he would throw it out of the window into the Guadiana, which ran below it. Any chagrin he had felt at being put under arrest, was entirely obliterated by the hearty congratulations and welcome he received from the officers assembled on parade next morning. But his indignation was soon called forth again by the manner in which Louis Lisle greeted him. On advancing towards him with his outstretched hand, Lisle bestowed upon him a cold and angry glance, turned on his heel, and withdrew to a distant part of the parade. Ronald's fiery blood boiled up within him; and, had not the memory of Alice arisen in his mind, subduing and softening him, he would there and then have called her brother to an account for his singular conduct. But smothering his indignation, he returned to the group of officers with a flushed brow and an angry eye, to have his temper sorely tried for some time about the Spanish lady, with regard to whom many stories had been circulated at the mess-table.

On the evening of that day the streets of Merida rang to the echo of muffled drums and the sad notes of the military dead-march, as the funeral of D'Estouville passed on its way to the church of San Juan, attended with similar honours as would have been shown to a British officer of the same rank.

The sword and cap, bearing the badges of the brave old Guard, were laid on the lid of his coffin, the pall of which was borne by Fassifern and five other field-officers. His countryman, De Mesmai, acted as chief mourner. Another officer of the French medical staff, who was also a prisoner in Merida, attended likewise. A smile of pleasure kindled in the proud eye of the cuirassier as the mournful procession passed between the ranks of the first brigade, leaning on their arms reversed, and lining the streets on both sides. He was well pleased at the sentiments of generosity and chivalry which directed Sir Rowland Hill to evince the same respect to the remains of a foe that would have been paid to those of a friend; and De Mesmai was one who knew well how to appreciate them. The grenadiers of the Gordon Highlanders formed outside the church, under the command of Major Campbell, and fired three volleys in the air, while the grave closed over the remains of what was once a gay and a gallant heart. The officers of the first brigade of infantry would have erected a monument to the memory of D'Estouville, but it was known that it would be demolished by the Spaniards the moment the British left the city; therefore the idea was abandoned, and the tomb of the guardsman lies unmarked and unknown, under the chancel of the great church of Merida, a few feet in front of the mutilated monument erected to the memory of Francisco Pizarro, of Truxillo. At the wine casa and the *rouge-et-noir* table, De Mesmai was loud that night in praises of British generosity and gallantry; but these he suddenly changed for something very like invectives, when he was informed that, by daylight next morning, he must

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be prepared to accompany a detachment of sick and prisoners, who were ordered to the rear.

"And where is our destination, monsieur, if I may inquire?" asked he of Claude A——, the adjutant of the Gordon Highlanders, who had made the communication to him in French. "Some gay place, I hope. Lisbon, is it?"

"The castle of Albuquerque, I believe."

"*Tête-dieu!* a most detestable and gloomy hole! And I am to be mewed up there, am I, monsieur?"

"For the present, until an opportunity occurs for your transmission to some strong garrison-town across the Portuguese frontier, or home to Britain."

"You are exceedingly kind, *Monsieur Officier*, by the name of the bomb! most superbly so. But I trust that dilatory little devil, General the Count d'Erlon, will save you all this trouble. And as for my transmission to England—*diable!* I should be sorry his Britannic Majesty's government should take so much concern in my affairs." He smiled sourly, and twirled his black moustaches. "Ha! and what sort of being is the officer who commands on the way to Albuquerque. I hope he will halt at La Nava: I left a sweetheart there twelve months ago, with whom I must leave my card in passing. But the officer,—is he a jovial trump, that will drink and play deep—stride, swagger, and swear like a Hector?"

"None of *ours* are much given to any of these habits," answered Claude, drily. "The Honourable Louis Lisle commands."

"Lisle! An ensign, is he not? A pretty boy with yellow curls, more like the Duchess de Choiseul's page than a belted soldier? Ah! we shall get on famously. Such a chit will not cross me in my amusements with these don Spaniards. De Mesmai, of Quinsay, under the orders of a young Scots sub-lieutenant. Ho, ho! excellent. But, body o' the Pope! tell me, monsieur, am I really to be kept in the castle of Albuquerque?"

"Captain de Mesmai, I have already told you," replied the adjutant, turning to go.

"Then permit me to acquaint you, monsieur, that such treatment is tacitly saying you doubt that sacred word of honour which I pledged to Ensign Ronald Stuart, when, as an officer and gentleman, I surrendered myself to him on parole. This being the case, that parole is dissolved; and I consider myself at liberty to effect my escape where, when, and how I please, without dishonour."

"As you choose," answered Claude quickly. "But remember, you will probably be shot in the attempt; or, if retaken, will be degraded to the rank of a private dragoon—what in your service you call a *simple cavalier*. Remember, monsieur, to be on the alert at daybreak; you will hear the sound of the warning-pipes as they pass under the piazzas of your billet."

With Lisle's detachment De Mesmai departed next morning for Albuquerque, but by some means effected his escape on the route there. He afterwards fell into the hands of some of the guerillas of Don Salvador de Zagala's band, by whom he was treated with less kindness and courtesy than he had received at Merida, and with whom I must for the present leave him.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

THE HEIGHTS OF ALBUERA.—THE CROSS OF SANTIAGO.

"Come away, come away,
Hark to the summons!
Come in your war array,
Gentles and commons.

"Come every hill-plaid, and
True heart that wears one;
Come every steel blade, and
Strong hand that bears one."

Pibroch of Donuildhu.

On the night of the 11th, or rather the morning of the 12th of June, Ronald was awakened from sleep by an officer, who occupied the same billet, entering his chamber half-dressed.

"Rouse, Stuart," said he; "something strange has happened. There is a noise and bustle over the whole town."

"I have heard nothing yet, Kennedy," answered the other, springing out of bed, and with military instinct donning his regimentals hastily in the dark. "You have aroused me from the most pleasant nap I have enjoyed for these six months past."

"Hark! there go the pipes."

"'Tis not the turn-out. What can be the matter? 'tis still two hours from daybreak. We shall be roughing it again with D'Erlon or Drouet, I suppose."

"The pipes have ceased," said Kennedy, throwing open the casement, where the voices of the musicians were heard engaged in a quarrel.

"Plaw *the warning*, Hector Macfarlane, you very great sumph!" exclaimed Macdonuil-dhu, the piper-major, in great wrath. "Was it *Hoggil nam Bo*—the pibroch of your ain mushroom name, I desired you to plaw?"

"Oich, prut trut!" replied Macfarlane fiercely. "I do suppose tat ta lads o' Lochsluai are as good and as pretty men, and bear as auld a name, as ony Macdonald o' the Isles. Diaoul!"

"Hoch, Got tam! it's mutiny and repellion this! Did ye move yer hand to yer dirk, Macfarlane?" asked Macdonald furiously. "Did ye grip yer dirk to threaten me?"

"It's a far cry to Lochowe. Gin you and I strode there, ye would na cock your feather or craw sae crouse," said the other coolly. "It's piper-matchor you are, and sorrow tak the hoor that Hector Macfarlane, the son of Rori-bheg, has to obey your orders!" The angry reply of the non-commissioned officer was lost in the sound of the war-pipe, the drones of which Macfarlane threw over his shoulder, and strode down the street swelling with Highland indignation, while he made Merida ring far and wide to the tune of *Johnnie Cope*, the warning for the march, while the drums, bugles, and trumpets of other regiments, horse and foot, were heard in various parts of the echoing city.

"Holloa! Serjeant Macdonald, what is all this noise and uproar about?" asked Stuart.

"I ken nae mair than an unporn pairn, sir," replied the leader of

the pipers; "put it's a tammed cauld morning to rouse puir chields frae their plankets. There is a soughing meeserable *Hanoverian* wind plawing frae the east, sharp enough to skin our pare hoghs, and be tammed tilt! And that trunken loon, Macfarlane, has sae mony queghsfu' under his belt, that he took the dorts, and in spite o' a' orders blew the pibroch o' Lochsloy. A ponnie thing for him—the son o' Rori-bheg, a riever, hanged at Crieff for *liftin'*, to speak in defiance at *me!*"

The voice of the adjutant bawling for his horse was now heard, as he issued from under the piazzas, attended by an orderly with a lighted lantern, to collect the reports and get the companies mustered. The men were already falling in at the alarm-post, and the musket-butts were heard clattering heavily on the pavement, as one by one they took their places in the ranks.

"Stuart, don your fighting jacket; pack up your best scarlets for a ball when we reach Madrid," cried Claude, as he passed the window. "We are about to show Mr. Soult the point of war,

'Gin he meets us in the morning,'

as the song says. A despatch has within this hour arrived from Wellington, and we are ordered off to the front forthwith, to prevent Estremadura being invaded. Turn out as soon as you can; the corps are nearly all mustered in our *Plaza de Armas*. Ho, there! orderly drummer; beat for the coverers! Fall in, covering serjeants!"

The grey daylight was now beginning to make objects visible. The sky was clear, and of a cold and dark blue, and a chilling blast swept through the dull and gloomy streets, where all was martial bustle and preparation. While dressing himself with more haste than care, Stuart heard the voice of Cameron and the adjutant ordering and directing the serjeant-major; he in turn bawled to the serjeants of companies, who were vociferously calling the rolls, in which an immense number of Jocks, and Tams, and Donalds followed each other in succession. All was commotion and "hurry-skurry," amid which De Costa's brigade of Spanish horse galloped past, brandishing their swords, and shouting, "*Arma! arma! Viva! Viva!*" with might and main. General Long's brigade of British followed, but in characteristic silence.

To prevent Marshal Soult from invading Estremadura from the neighbouring province, Sir Rowland Hill marched his brigades of horse and foot to Sancho Perez, collecting from Zafra and other places on his march all the Spanish and Portuguese troops he could bring together to meet the enemy, who advanced towards him in great strength, plundering and destroying the grain and vines on their route. At Zafra they attacked and defeated an advanced corps of Spanish dragoons, commanded by the Condé Penne Villamur. Animated by this success, Soult continued to press forward at the head of thirty-eight or forty thousand men; and Sir Rowland Hill prudently fell back upon the heights of Albuera with his division, twenty-two thousand strong. There he took up a position, which every means were taken to strengthen by the erection of trenches, breastworks, and traverses, at the formation of which fatigue-parties wrought day and night. Fresh troops joined them here daily, and Ronald heard, with considerable pleasure, that Don Alvaro's troop of lances were expected to join the Spanish brigade. Alvaro's command was a sort of independent troop, unattached to any regiment, like *les compagnies franches*, the free

troops or companies, in the old French service. The second division occupied this intrenched position twelve days, awaiting the appearance of Soult, who advanced no nearer than Santa Martha, a town about a long day's march distant. He showed no disposition to fight a second battle of Albuera, the ground being so strong and its occupiers so determined, that the heights could only have been captured with immense loss,—if indeed Soult could have carried them at all. On the first night after the position was taken up, a blunder of Evan's caused no ordinary commotion throughout the camp.

At the base of the heights, where a stream called the Albuera runs, he was posted as an advanced sentinel in a most wild and dreary spot. A wide and desolate plain, stretching away towards Santa Martha, lay before him; black ridges like waves of ink rose behind; and all around were scattered the ghastly remnants of the battle fought on the ground twelve months previously. The night was gloomy and dark, the sky was starless, and not a sound broke the solemn stillness of the hour, save the Albuera, brawling and gurgling along that deep and savage-looking ravine, by means of which the French had out-flanked the Spaniards.

Excepting the murmur of the mountain-torrent, all was silent as the tomb; not a blade of grass was stirring, and those gloomy fantasies, so apt to fill the strong imagination of a Highlander, arose appallingly before Evan. Anxiously and intently he had fixed his eyes on some shrubbery or tall weeds, which appeared in the twilight afar off. These his heated imagination transformed into battalions of foot and squadrons of horse, advancing stealthily over the plain. He fired his musket, and retired on the main body of his picquet, which lay within an *abbatis* composed of cork-trees, felled and interwined for a breastwork around them. The whole camp rose in arms, expecting instantly to be attacked, but the dawn revealed the cause of Evan's mistake. A few days after Soult had taken possession of Santa Martha, Ronald had the command of one of the picquets thrown out in that direction. All were on the alert, as the enemy were continually expected to advance from their cantonments. The picquet, which consisted of thirty Highlanders, occupied the summit of a rocky eminence; where, piling their arms, they lay down on the green sward to watch the sun, as it verged towards the western horizon, glittering on the polished arms of solitary sentinels and videttes posted at equal distances along the banks of the rocky river, and in front of that dark forest from the bosom of which its waters came. A Spanish sunset is a glorious scene in June, but which of the Highlanders there would have exchanged the Scottish pine or purple heath, for the olive-grove or clustering grapes of Spain? Ronald was seated in a grassy nook, employed in conning over the pages of the Madrid *Gaceta*, when he was roused by the trampling of hoofs and clang of harness. He sprang up in time to see the shining helmets of a hundred French cuirassiers flashing in the sunbeams, as they issued successively from a deep and narrow gorge on his left, into which they had contrived to penetrate and advance unseen,—evading thus the sentinels of the other picquets.

"Death and fury! we are lost men. Our retreat is cut off! Stand to your arms," cried he, drawing his sword. "Form circle round the face of the rock,—show your front to them! Be cool, and steadily take your aim. Keep up your fire till the cavalry picquets in front of the wood ride to our rescue. Ha! the gallant 9th are in their saddles already."

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With coolness and precision his orders were obeyed. The brave little band, aware of the power of foot over horse, formed circle round the eminence, and opened a close and well-directed fire, before which the cuirassiers were compelled to waver, recoil, and stay for some minutes their headlong charge, being impeded and entangled with falling men and horses; and the former, if not dead when they fell, were soon trodden to death by the hoofs of the rear rank.

"Charge!" cried the officer, a dashing fellow, who led them on. "*Chargez en queue la troupe!*" and, firing their pistols, they came furiously forward sword in hand, making the turf shake as they thundered along. It was a critical moment for the little band! A sharp twinge in his left shoulder informed Ronald that a pistol-shot had taken effect there, depriving him of the use of his arm; and several of his men lay killed and wounded among the feet of their comrades, who could not help feeling a little dismayed at the overwhelming number of their opponents.

"Keep up your fire, brave Highlanders! stand fast, true Scotsmen!" cried Stuart, brandishing his claymore. "Aim deliberately, and level low; strike below the corslet. Courage, my boys! 'tis all for our lives. They will kill, as they cannot capture. Hold your ground! keep shoulder to shoulder, and give them the bayonet at the face of the rocks. Hurrah! well done, my own brave comrades! We shall be rescued instantly."

The cuirassiers advanced in a semicircle boldly enough; but the steady fire of their opponents caused them again to recoil.

"*Vive l'Empereur! Chateaufleur, Chateaufleur! retournez à la charge. Charge!*" cried the officer again, and again the serried ranks came rushing on with renewed impetuosity; but they were once more driven back, leaving the ground strown with writhing men and steeds. A few resolutely pressed forward in the rashness of their daring, and struck at the defenders of the rock across the ridge of deadly bayonets which protruded over it. But they were at once destroyed, shot and bayoneted. One soldier, who was cut across the face, clubbed his musket and dashed out the brains of his adversary. And one powerful French dragoon grasped the serjeant of the picquet and attempted to drag him down by main strength from the rock; but Ronald saved him, by plunging his sword through the corslet of the Frenchman, who tumbled from his saddle, and was dragged away down the ravine of the Albuera by his affrighted horse.

The rock was again free, but not entirely so, as the cuirassiers, who were reduced to half their original number, were preparing to renew the attack, which appeared to be general along the whole chain of outposts, as the sound of firing was heard in every direction. The picquets of the 39th and 66th regiments, on the right and left, were retiring rearward on the heights, firing as they fell back, on bodies of the enemy's cavalry, which were advancing over the plain. Ronald beheld all the other out-picquets retiring in safety. His alone had been cut off, and by means of that accursed ravine! His little party were now reduced to sixteen effective men, and he gave them and himself up for lost. But aid was nigh: part of De Costa's cavalry, lying in front of the wood, were ordered forward by Sir Rowland Hill to his rescue. Onward they came with the speed of the wind, bearing death on the points of their spears. Ronald beheld with delight that it was the troop of Alvaro de Villa Franca, who had just joined De Costa, which was moving to his

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aid. As they came on, they raised the old battle-cry of Spain. "*San Jago, y cierra Espana!*" was the shout, as they swept gallantly on in a compact mass,—horse to horse, helms and corslets glancing, plumes and pennons waving.

"*Senora Beatificada* strengthen our spears!" cried Alvaro, rushing forward with his uplifted sword. "Follow me, Montesa! Saint James and Close Spain! Stand, Frenchmen, if ye be true cavaliers! *Viva! San Jago, y cierra Espana! Cerrar con el enemigos!*"

The lances of the front rank sunk to the rest, while those of the rear protruded over the casques of the former, and onward still they pressed, shaking the very rock from which the rescued picquet viewed this new conflict. Not a whit dismayed at the number or character of their opponents, the undaunted cuirassiers met them half-way, and a most gallant hand-to-hand conflict ensued. The scene when the adversaries first met was a perfect combat in the style of the days of chivalry,—the realization of a scene of romance. The proud battle-cry of the Spaniards, answered by the "*Vive l'Empereur!*" of the French,—the crash of lances, splintering on casque and corslet,—the clash of blades,—the tramp of hoofs,—the dust,—the blood,—the groans and shrieks,—the curses,—the spurring and prancing, as the parties intermingled,—the brown uniforms and the blue,—the steel helmets and the brass,—the red plumes and the black,—the tall spears and uplifted sabres flashing in the setting sun,—the gaudy standard of the Spaniards,—the eagled guidon of the French, fluttering and waving above the conflict—the dead and the wounded trodden heedlessly below,—formed altogether a most exciting and soul-stirring scene.

Alvaro distinguished himself in no ordinary degree. The long horse-hair on his crest was seen dancing up and down amidst the thickest of the *mêlée*, and whenever his sword descended, a saddle was emptied by the blow. But Ronald could not remain long to witness the valour of his friend, although he eagerly wished to do so. He drew off the remnant of his picquet, and, crossing the Albuera, retired into the trenches of the camp, where of course the whole division were under arms.

The outposts were driven in on all sides; and satisfied with this display, Soult brought off his cavalry, who had suffered severely in the contest. Ronald's wound was found to be severe; but the shoulder-blade had escaped fracture, and as soon as it was dressed, he rejoined his company with his arm slung. On the disappearance of the French, the troops piled arms, and all was again the same as before, save the plain in front of Albuera, which was strewn with dead and wounded, and other relics of the skirmish.

As Stuart sat in his tent, writing an account of the day's fray for Lochisla, the door became darkened, and Don Alvaro, entering, grasped him by the hand. He was pale with fatigue, and Ronald knew, by the increased gravity and sorrow imprinted on his features, that he was aware of his sister's death, and that it lay heavy on his heart.

"*Amigo mio,*" said he, "a minute later had seen your brave picquet cut to pieces. We drove back these gay cuirassiers in glorious style, fighting, like true soldados, at point of sword and spear every inch of the way."

"I have a thousand thanks to return you, Don Alvaro, for the dauntless manner in which you rode to the rescue. These cuirassiers

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were tough fellows, and fought with a bravery equalled only by that of their opponents."

"Stay, senor; there is another subject on which I would rather converse with you, than of our hourly occupation of fighting," replied Villa Franca, as he cast aside his leather gauntlets, and unclasping his helmet, wiped the dust from his swarthy face and dark moustaches. "Catalina, my idolized sister,—I would ask you about her?"

Stuart's heart beat quicker. "You have then heard?" said he sorrowfully.

"Yes, senor; from Ignacio El Pastor, a priest of Estremadura, I learned the terrible intelligence. I fell in with him near Badajoz, when bearing your letter to my cousin and wife Donna Inesella. I took the liberty of opening it, and making myself master of its contents; and thus became aware of my sister's dishonour and deplorable murder. Don Ronald Stuart, there is something very singular in all that affair; and I must request that you will give me a detailed account of the whole occurrence, without the omission of a single circumstance, for the truth of which I hold your honour, as a cavalier and soldier."

"How is this, Senor Alvaro?" replied Ronald, alike surprised and displeased at the tone and bearing of the Spaniard. "I consider it next to an impossibility that you should suspect *me* of anything wrong, or of leaving anything undone."

"*Amigo mio,* your pardon. I spoke somewhat hastily; but when I mention the tumult of this day's conflict, and the excitement which the recollection of my dear and beautiful sister arouses within me, I have a sufficient apology." He leant against the pole of the tent and covered his face with his hands, betraying an emotion in which Ronald could not but participate. "Pardon me, Senor Stuart," continued the cavalier, "you loved my poor sister too well to deserve that I should judge harshly of you; but say on, and tell all you know of her dreadful death."

The Spaniard stretched himself on the turf floor of the tent, and resting on his helmet, leant his head upon his hand, and fixing his keen dark eyes upon Ronald's, listened to the account given by the latter of her death. He began with his meeting her at Almarez, and without concealing a single sentiment which had animated them, or an observation which had passed, he continued the narrative down to the hour of her burial at the convent of Jarciejo. But both became greatly excited as the tale proceeded. Love, sorrow, and indignation caused Ronald's features to flush, and his brow to knit; but those of the hot-brained Spaniard became black with fury, and convulsed with the excess of those passions to which his tongue could not give utterance. He wept and groaned, and grasped the hilt of his poniard energetically. When Ronald ceased, he started from the ground, with his large dark eyes flashing like those of an incarnate demon.

"Moderate your transports, Don Alvaro; be calm, I beseech you!" said Stuart, grasping him by the arm.

"Cavalier, your story has driven me to frenzy," cried he, through his clenched teeth. "You cannot have loved Catalina as she deserved to be loved, otherwise you would not be so calm in such a terrible hour as this. Excuse me, senor; alas! I know not what I utter. You come of a northern people, less prompt to ire and vengeance than the fiery Spaniard. But much as you may have heard of Spanish ven-

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geance," said he, becoming suddenly calm, "all the tales that have been told of it since the days of King Bamba or Roderick the Goth will fall immeasurably short of mine. I have left no means untried to capture Narvaez Cifuentes, but where the ban-dog lurks at present I know not. But the hour of retribution will yet come, and my fury will burst on his devoted brow like a thunderbolt." He sunk upon his knees, and ratified a solemn vow of vengeance by kissing the bare blade and cross-hilt of his stiletto. "Senor," said he, "is it the custom in your native land to swear across the dagger?"*

"In the days of my grandsire it was; and there are yet some among our Scottish hills who consider none now binding, unless sworn over the unsheathed dirk."

"'Tis well: it shows the military spirit of your people. Conform to the present customs of Spain, and to those of your northern ancestors. Swear with me, cavalier."

Promptly as Alvaro could have wished, Ronald unsheathed the long Highland dirk with which he had lately equipped himself. It was a handsome weapon set with jewels, and accoutred with knife and fork, like the regimental dirks now worn by every Highland officer: and across it he vowed to aid Alvaro in delivering Cifuentes up to vengeance.

"This is well. I will now be calm," said the cavalier in a tone of satisfaction. "You may have some scruples about slaying the dog with your own hand; but deliver him over to the first alcalde, and he will reserve him for the fury of Alvaro of Villa Franca."

"Such a reservation may do, should I meet him in camp or city; but woe to him should we forgather in any desert spot,—my sword and his heart will not be long asunder."

"Spoken like a true hidalgo, who needs no friend save his own right hand. Our Lady del Pilar! slay me this earthly fiend, and I will consider you as much my brother as if my sister, my sublime Catalina, had wedded you at the altar. Although in truth, to be frank with you, I would rather she had bestowed her hand on her cousin, the Condé of Truxillo, a brave cavalier, who has loved her long and dearly. What now, Pedro? Do you bring me the list of killed and wounded?" said he, as Serjeant Gomez stood erect at the triangular door of the tent, and brought his right hand up to the peak of his helmet, in a sweeping military salute.

"The Valencian rogue, senor cavalier; how are we to dispose of him?"

"Ha! I had forgotten. Right, my true soldado. A base goatherd, senor," said he, turning to Ronald, "a most contemptible traitor, who guided up the ravine those hundred cuirassiers who so nearly cut your picquet off. Pedro captured the rogue after the skirmish. He is a notorious spy and traitor. Where is he now, Pedro?"

"Tied hard and fast, like a Merino sheep, under the belly of my Andalusian," answered Pedro with a grin.

"You had better turn him over to the provost-marshal of the camp," said Ronald; "he will give him his deserts from the branch of the nearest tree. The rascal! by his treachery to his country my company has lost fourteen gallant hearts, and I have won this wound."

"As he is a prisoner of mine," said Alvaro, "I will dispose of him,

* All oaths in courts of law, and others in Spain, are sworn across a sword or dagger.

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and save senor the provost-marshal any trouble in the matter. Desire a file of troopers to dismount and load their carbines,—no! that were a waste of King Ferdinand's powder. Run your dagger into his throat, Pedro, and see that you strike deep; then fling his carcase over the rocks into the Albuera, and let it rot in that same ravine that he knows so well."

Pedro disappeared, and almost instantly a prolonged shriek, which startled the whole camp, announced that the unscrupulous *sargento* had obeyed his orders to the very letter. Ronald was about to express some abhorrence of this summary mode of execution, when he was interrupted.

"Villa Franca," said a handsome Spanish cavalry officer, about twenty years of age, appearing at the door of the tent; "the Condé Penne Villamur wishes to see you. Our brigade and De Costa's have been ordered to the front, as an advanced post. Such are the orders of Sir Rowland Hill. The condé would speak with you without delay, and our trumpets will sound 'to horse' in an hour."

"'Tis well, Lorenzo. I am in a true fighting mood to-day, and our troop of lancers are in glorious order. The Marquess de Montesa of Valencia," said Alvaro, introducing the stranger to Ronald, "the senior lieutenant of my lances."

"A sharp skirmish that was, in which we were engaged a short time ago, senor," said Montesa with a laugh. He was one of those gay fellows who laugh at everything. "We appear to have shared alike in the misfortunes of war," he added, pointing to his left arm, which was bound up in his red Spanish scarf.

"Ha, marquess! your presence reminds me of what other thoughts had nearly driven from my memory. Look you, Senor Don Ronald," said Alvaro, displaying a golden cross suspended by a red and yellow riband. "We have been commissioned by my relative, Alfonso de Conquesta, Grand-master of the military order of Saint James of Spain, to invest you with this badge, and create you a knight-companion of our most honourable order, as a reward for your bravery at Almarez, accounts of which have been fully blazoned forth by the *Gacetas* of Madrid and other places."

Stuart, who had longed with all the ardour of a young soldier for some of those military decorations with which the bosoms of foreign troops are covered, received the cross with a pleasure which he could not conceal. At that time neither medal nor star was to be seen in our service, save among the officers of the 15th Light Dragoons, who received from the Emperor of Germany an "Order of Merit" for their singular bravery at Villiers-en-Couché, in 1794.

"A most beautiful cross indeed, Don Alvaro," said Stuart; "but our mess are droll fellows, and I shall be sadly quizzed about it."

"A badge such as this should raise other sentiments than those of ridicule in the minds of honourable cavaliers," observed Montesa. "You will find it a star for the ladies' eyes to follow. Our Spanish damsels know well, that the tried and proved soldier alone wins the cross and riband of St. James."

"The marquess has your diploma of knighthood in his sabre-tache: he will explain to you the rules of the order. Meanwhile, I shall attend the noble condé," said Alvaro, and departed. The diploma, a parchment containing the oath, the rules of the order, and bearing its seal appended, was written in Spanish and Latin, and Ronald was a little startled at the tenour of the vow.

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"'Tis no small honour the noble and venerable Grand-master confers upon you, senor," said Montesa, after reading over the document. "The order of Saint James is one of the most ancient and chivalric in Spain. It was instituted, in the year 1170, by Ferdinand II., king of Leon and Galicia. It is conferred solely on hidalgos of the highest rank, very seldom on foreigners, and never yet on a heretic."

"I am afraid, marquess, your Spanish prejudices will incline you to class me with the latter."

"I trust that, although as true a Catholic as ever kissed cross, I have more liberality, and the Grand-master is too anxious to enrol you as a gallant soldier in the order, to inquire much about your tenets, which in truth are doubtful," said Montesa laughing, "if I may believe the reports of my fair cousin, the abbess of Santa Cruz. Religious inquiries may be dispensed with, but for form's sake the vows are indispensable; and when Alvaro returns, we will examine and sign the diploma sent hither by Don Alfonso."

"The vows; I should be glad to know them. By your cross, I perceive that you are a knight of the order."

"Every Spanish officer of distinction is," replied Montesa, with a proud smile. "We are supposed to observe the rules of San Austin, and vow obedience, conjugal fidelity to our wives—*demonio!* and service to all ladies. Things easily sworn to," added he, laughing heartily, "but hard to keep in Spain. By San Jago! I have broken them a score of times. Senor, you know that vows and restrictions which suited the steel-clad knights of Ferdinand of Leon, will scarcely suit the cigar-smoking and dashing officers of Murillo or Don Carlos D'Espagna's divisions. Our Lady! we would as soon swear to the vows of the bare-footed Franciscan. But you will have to make it appear that your ancestors have been, at least, hidalgos or gentlemen for four generations."

"For sixteen, if you choose, marquess; but I should need the assistance of some northern bard to unravel the matter. However, my colonel will resolve that point for you."

"And that in your veins there runs not the base blood of Jew, Morisco, or heretic; and that you have never been called in question by the late Inquisition,—the devil confound it!"

"To these I may freely swear No! on blade and bible."

"You see by the diploma," continued Montesa, with a droll smile, "that knights in their noviciate are obliged to tug an oar in the king's galleys for six months, to harden them to labour; and then live for six months more in a Carthusian monastery, fasting and praying, being the while scantily supplied with black bread, and liberally with water to wash away their sins and enormities."

"The deuce, marquess! These disagreeable preliminaries will scarcely suit me; and I fear I must forego the high honour intended me by the venerable Grand-master."

"Not at all, senor," replied Montesa. "Were these parts of the military noviciate to be rigorously exacted, how very few of our Spanish caballeros of Madrid would display their crosses on the gay Prados. By Santiago! I would see De Conquesta and his order at the bottom of the Mediterranean, before I would submit to such degradation. Besides, senor, if twelve months' campaigning here will not harden us, nothing on earth will."

"How then, marquess?"

"A few doubloons paid to the grand-treasurer, at Cadiz, where at

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present Don Alfonso resides, will procure you a dispensation from these, and all will then be right. Ha! here comes Villa Franca. You have made despatch with the condé."

"Montesa," said Alvaro, entering, "our trumpets will blow 'boot and saddle' instantly. The Spanish horse will relieve General Long's brigade of the out-picquet duty on the Santa Martha road. We move the moment the sun dips behind the heights of Albuera."

"You will probably see some fighting before dawn."

"True, Senor Stuart; and perhaps a few saddles will be emptied before the bugles sound the *réveille*," replied Montesa, whose own was doomed to be one of them. "Ho! there go our trumpeters already. Alvaro, we had better invest our friend with his cross; dispensing, of course, with the mummery of monks and godfathers. *Diavolo!* we ought to have had a fair lady to clasp on his belt and affix the star. Would we were near the convent of Jarciejo!"

"The lady must be dispensed with likewise. Hark! the condé already blows 'to horse!' He is somewhat impatient, truly. Lend me your sword, marquess; I cannot bestow the knighthood with mine, as the cross-guard was broken off in our late fandango with the enemy. Let us seek the tent of Don Juan Cameron; and when we have been satisfied on some points of lineage, *amigo mio*, amidst the officers of your own brave regiment, you shall become our sworn knight-companion."

"A most unceremonious instalment," said Montesa, "but war and necessity must be pleaded for our excuse; and the knight that is created in a tent, is more likely to prove a true cavalier than he who receives his spurs in the carpeted palace or decorated chapel."

In Fassifern's tent, Stuart was duly dubbed knight of Saint James, having, as such, the privilege of wearing his bonnet in the presence of the king of Spain. As soon as the hasty ceremony was over, the Spaniards sprung to their saddles and departed, leaving Ronald with the cross on his breast, amid a circle of his brother-officers, who, with their congratulations, threw in sundry dry jokes.

For many months afterwards he was known among them as "the knight of Santiago," seldom receiving any other name except when on duty. Jokes must be furnished for mess and parade, and Ronald's cross was a standing one. He became, however, a greater favourite with the colonel and regiment. He was esteemed by the officers and beloved by the soldiers, who would, as they emphatically said, "storm hell's yetts to serve him." Than British soldiers, none know better how to appreciate the good qualities of an officer who treats them well; and their love, esteem, and confidence, which cannot fail being of service to the officer himself, are easily gained by kindness and affability. Nor was Saint James's cross the only piece of good fortune that Ronald obtained. He had returned to his tent, where he sat finishing his letter for Lochisla, and regretting bitterly that he was unable to send another for Inchavon, when Alister came in with a newspaper in each hand.

"I congratulate you, Sir Knight of Santiago de Compostella; the saints are propitious to you certainly, or the Horse-Guards at least. Lisle has sent me these papers up from the castle of Belem, from which place he was just about to set out on his return with a detachment of convalescents. Look you here."

"What! any more orders of knighthood?"

"Something more substantial. 'War-office, 24th—no, 28th foot,

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Lieut. Dalbiac to be captain, *vice* Paget, killed in action. Ensign Stuart, from the 92nd Highlanders, to be lieutenant, *vice* Dalbiac.' "

"Ha! is it really possible?" exclaimed Ronald, springing up.

"Quite, and a most lucky dog you are. You may thank Almarez and Sir Rowland Hill for this. He recommended you for promotion, you know."

"The 28th is an English regiment—"

"The gallant *slashers*."

"I should be sorry to leave the Highlanders—one of our most dashing national regiments."

"Your taste appears to be consulted admirably. Look at this *Gazette* in the next paper. '92nd Highlanders.—Brevet-major Colin Campbell to be major, *vice* Macdonald, appointed to the 8th Garrison Battalion; Lieut. Macdonald to be captain, *vice* Campbell; Lieut. Ronald Stuart, from the 28th foot, to be lieutenant, *vice* the Honourable Sholto Douglas, who exchanges.' "

"Excellent!" exclaimed Stuart, as they shook hands. "I shall be with you still: Cameron has planned this matter, surely. But this Honourable Sholto,—I have never had the pleasure of seeing him."

"Oh! he has been on the staff in Ireland for these three years past. A drawing-room soldier, that has no idea of bivouacs and tough ration beef—fording rivers up to the neck, and having forced marches of forty miles. Sholto has kept himself clear of these matters, and is, consequently, no favourite with the chief,—Cameron, I mean: the warning he gave me about that title at San Pedro must not be forgotten. I wish you joy heartily, Ronald, notwithstanding you are promoted over my head. However, I am near the top of the ensigns, and the next engagement may provide for some of the seniors. We must wet the new commission to-night in glorious style; and, hark! firing, by Jove! The out-picquets are engaged! Soult is at it again." Drawing back the door of the tent, they saw the flashes of musketry and gleam of steel appear on the Santa Martha road, and wreaths of white smoke curling up among the rocks and broken ground between, showing that a running skirmish had commenced.

The noise of the firing became more rapid and loud, and then died away; and the Spanish cavalry were seen sword in hand, pursuing the French at full gallop. The Condé Penne Villamur had repelled the attack of the French cuirassiers, and having defeated them, rashly left his ground in pursuit along the road to Santa Martha; where, falling into an ambush of several squadrons of horse, his Spaniards were almost all cut to pieces. Don Alvaro, at the head of his lancers, charged madly through and through them, and brought off the condé, after a most desperate and bloody conflict fought hand to hand with sword and spear, amid which the gay and brave young Marquess of Montesa was slain, being "cloven to the teeth, through steel and bone," by Louis Chateaufleur, a major of cuirassiers, mentioned by De Mesmai in preceding chapters. Alvaro was so severely wounded by a sword-thrust between the joints of his breast and back-plate, that he was rendered unserviceable for some time; and procuring leave, departed for Idanha-a-Velha, where Donna Inesella still resided.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MARCH TO TOLEDO.

"O, leeze me on the philabeg,
The hairy knee and gartered leg!
But aye the thing that glads my e'e,
Is the *white cockade* aboon the bree."

Jacobite Song.

Sir Rowland Hill, finding that the French marshal lacked determination to attack his strong position at Albuera, resolved to assail his legions in their quarters at Santa Martha, for which place the whole division marched on the morning of the 1st July. The enemy retired as usual before him, their rear-guard skirmishing with the cavalry advance of the British, who suffered some loss at forcing the passage of the Guadacia, upon the ford of which the French brought their flying artillery to bear; and against Berlenza some fighting ensued, and Ronald Stuart narrowly escaped being cut in two by an eighteen-pound shot from the enemy's guns. Many weeks were consumed in tedious marching and skirmishing, in which there was neither glory nor gain to be acquired; and right glad were the second division when the route for the gay city of Aranjuez, the Windsor of Spain, reached them while stationed at the dull and uninteresting town of Don Benito.

At Llerena, a town romantically situated at the base of the huge Sierra San Bernardo, they received intelligence of the glorious victory won by Lord Wellington's army over that of Marshal Marmont on the field of Salamanca; and learned that Joseph, the *ci-devant* king of Spain, had been driven from his usurped throne, and compelled to establish his head-quarters in the city of Valencia.

A Spanish peasant, who had witnessed the battle, brought the tidings to Llerena, which was illuminated in consequence; and a huge bonfire, lighted by the 36th regiment, blazed from the summit of San Bernardo.

When news of the victory obtained at Salamanca reached Marshal Soult, he raised the siege of Cadiz and retreated towards Cordova, leaving his cannon and ammunition in the hands of the British. He drew off all his troops from Estremadura, in consequence of which the presence of the second division was no longer requisite in that province: hence the unexpected route for Aranjuez. Gladly they bade farewell to Don Benito, turning their faces towards Castile—the famous and romantic Castile,—of old the land of the warrior and troubadour, of love and chivalry, "of battle and of song."

At Truxillo Ronald had the pleasure of again seeing his friend the Capitan Conquesta, who presented him to his newly-wedded bride, Donna Maria, with whose history the reader is already acquainted. Ronald spent a very pleasant evening with the cavalier, who, for his edification, fought over again the campaigns of Buenos Ayres, enriched with many episodes, in which he himself, and "that stout and honourable cavalier the General Liniers," acted prominent parts.

At Truxillo Stuart was appointed one of the lieutenants of the light company, an alteration which he considered no small compliment, as the smartest fellows alone are selected for the flank companies. On

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marching past the convent walls of Jarciejo, they were greeted by many a *viva* from the nuns, who waved their white kerchiefs from the grated loop-holes to the troops, who replied to them by loud cheers, each corps making the old walls shake as they came up in succession. Ronald's heart was, perhaps, the saddest there among thirty thousand men. It was impossible to be otherwise than sorrowful, when so near the tomb of the high-souled and noble Catalina. The same evening they crossed the Tagus at Almarez, by a pontoon bridge. It was with mingled feelings of pride and veneration that the three regiments of the first brigade passed the spot, where so many brave comrades had found a soldier's last resting-place. The ruined forts were now overhung with wild weeds and grass; the wall-flower, the honeysuckle, and ivy clung to the embrasures of Fort Napoleon, and nodded on the remnant of the old tower of Ragusa. In some places a fleshless bone projecting from the sod bore witness of the hasty interment received by the dead. On descending from the pass of Miravete they came in sight of Almarez, its rocks, and woods, and winding river, just as the broad setting sun went down in all its glory. A loud and exulting cheer burst from the bonneted Highlanders, and was carried along the column to the rear, reverberated a thousand times among the splintered peaks and frowning craigs of the Lina. The bands of the 50th, the 71st, and 92nd regiments struck up the "British Grenadiers;" and thus they passed in their glitter and pride, with drums beating and colours flying, above the sod that covered the breast of many a gallant comrade. It was a proud time for the first brigade; and while their hearts throbbed quicker to the "spirit-stirring" roll of the drum, or swell of the merry bugle, they forgot not that they trod near the tomb of those who heard their notes no more.

Two days afterwards the troops occupied the town of Calzada de Orepesa, in the midst of which stood an old baronial fortalice, or square embattled tower, which was garrisoned by a party of Don Salvador de Zagala's guerilla corps. Soon after seeing his light company dismissed to their several billets, Ronald, on passing this keep, was surprised to hear his name eagerly and distinctly called by some one within it; and on looking up at its huge gloomy front, beheld a hand beckoning to him through a narrow loop-hole, which was cut at the top and bottom for the ejection of arrows in the olden time. Who could be thus imprisoned here, and acquainted with his name, he was utterly at a loss to conjecture; but he turned to the guard of guerillas; who lay reposing on the earth in a cool shady place, under the masses of wild vines which straggled over the barbican wall, smoking cigars and burnishing their arms, which, as well as their dress, were of so motley a kind as to remind Ronald of his old acquaintances in the wood of La Nava. All wore the red military cockade of Spain fastened to the front of their broad hats or slouching caps.

On inquiring who was imprisoned in the tower, they replied a ladrone or thief, and brought to him a guerilla, whom they dignified with the title of *Senor el Castellano*, *i.e.* the constable or governor of the castle, a huge-headed, broad-shouldered, brawny, and muscular fellow, who had evidently been a muleteer, but had resigned the whip and bells for the musket and poniard. He wore a pair of French epaulets on his mule-driver's jacket; a sash encircled his waist, bearing a powder-horn, and several pistols and daggers; the large plume of some staff officer decorated his sombrero, and his followers were most of them arrayed

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likewise in the trappings of the slain. The castellano received Ronald with much respect, and led him through the windings and intricacies of the ancient tower, which, with its round wheel-stairs, arched passages, and narrow loopholes, reminded him of the old pile at Lochisla. From the number of doors which were unlocked by huge clanking keys in their progress, Stuart was led to expect something extraordinary, but on reaching a solitary turret chamber, when the door was thrown open, what was his surprise to behold Captain de Mesmai, whom he supposed to be in the castle of Albuquerque. He was miserably altered, and Ronald, while he beheld him, became filled with pity and indignation—pity for his situation, and indignation at the ungenerous Spaniards. His blue uniform had been stripped of its lace, epaulets, stars, and medals, and hung about him in tatters, showing his skin in many places. A guerilla on sentry at the door had appropriated the helmet and corslet of the 10th to himself. De Mesmai had been plundered of his boots, and his feet were in a miserable state in consequence of the long marches the guerillas had compelled him to make. He was thin and gaunt, and a beard of a week's growth bristled upon his chin; but there was the same merry devil-may-care twinkle in his eye, which showed that his bold and buoyant heart was yet unchanged.

"*Vive la bagatelle—Hoa! Vive la joie!*" cried he, springing forward and clasping Ronald in his arms with true French energy, "My dear friend, you may judge how glad I am to see you. I shall now be rescued from the brutality of these base and accursed Spanish dogs." As this was said in Spanish, lightning gleamed in the eyes of Castellano, who stood by. He grasped the hilt of his poniard, but relinquished it as Ronald's fiery and threatening glance fell on him. Yet he scowled malignantly at De Mesmai as he withdrew his hand.

"Ah, Stuart, *mon ami!* of what I have suffered at the hands of these guerillas you can form no idea. I have been plundered as you see; I have been beaten, kicked, even spit upon. *Mon Dieu!* such treatment for a gentleman and soldier of France! I have been locked up in this desolate stone chamber for four nights and days, during which not one morsel of food has passed my lips."

"Rascal! do you dare to treat an honourable prisoner of war thus?" exclaimed Ronald, turning to the Spaniard, who bestowed a sullen look upon him, but made no reply.

"I fully expected that before this," continued De Mesmai, "D'Erlon would have made some effort to effect my exchange. The devil confound him! I will revenge myself on him for his forgetfulness, by being doubly sweet to madame, his dear little countess, whose fortunate *cher ami* I have the honour to be. *Diable!* what would the 10th cuirassiers,—the pets of the Parisian ladies,—the dandies and glory of the Boulevards, say, could they see me in this plight? Faith, I believe a dozen girls in the Rue des Trois Maries would run crazy, could they know of it. *Diablement!* shirtless and shoeless,—and with a coat as holy as that of Monseigneur St. Denis, which hangs in the aisle of the old church of Besançon. Look at me, Monsieur Stuart; your allies, the guerillas, have done all this. But I will revenge myself on D'Erlon, and garnish his empty old head with certain ornaments which shall be nameless,—I will, by the name of the bomb!"

"I am glad to find that your high spirits have not deserted you, and that you are as merry a fellow as ever. Can it be, that those wretches have really starved you thus?"

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"For four days, my friend," said De Mesmai; "four days and four nights, on my sacred honour! my most earnest entreaties for bread were disregarded. When I used humbly to request, *Pan, gracios Senor Castellano,—pan en el nombre de Dios?* this scowling coward used to point to the village, ruined by Massena's troops, and reply,—*Carajo! Perro é ladrone! El Espanol no hay nada. A quien Dios de mala ventura!* 'Dog and thief! the Spaniard has none. Ill luck to you!' This was my hourly answer. *Tête-Dieu!* how my blood has boiled up within me, and I have longed to thrust my hand into his ungenerous heart. *Sacre!* with two of my gallant 10th at my back, and were I again astride of my fleet Norman, I could soon make these rascals fly like hares before the hound. But may this right hand and arm be withered and shrunken unto the shoulder, if ever again it spares the life of a Spaniard when my sword has once laid the dog at my mercy. I will revenge in red blood the countless, the never-to-be-forgotten indignities I have received from these infernal guerillas. They have been taunting me for these few days past with a defeat which, they say, Marmont has met with at Salamanca. Bah! Lord Wellington could never beat Marmont, and I know the rogues have lied."

Ronald smiled, but made no effort to undeceive him. "Take my arm, De Mesmai, and permit me to lead you from this place," said he, apprehensive that blows would soon be exchanged between the Gaul and Spaniard, who glared at each other with unspeakable hatred and ferocity.

"*Vive la joie!* how I rejoiced when I beheld the scarlet columns of the British descending by the Navil Moral road on Calzada de Orepesa. I knew that my hour of deliverance was at hand."

"Come, then; march, monsieur. Let us leave this dismal tower? Stand aside, worthy Senor Castellano."

"*Satanos, Senor Officiale!* it cannot be that you mean to release our prisoner?" asked the guerilla, grasping his poniard again.

"Unhand your dagger, you rascally guerilla! or I will seize you by the throat, and hurl you to the bottom of your tower," cried Ronald, laying his hand on his sword.

"*Il a la mine guerrier,*" said De Mesmai, sneeringly, in his native language, and laughing at the guerilla, who still hesitated, while others came crowding into the apartment, and began to handle the locks of their muskets. "Would to St. Belzebub I had a weapon to strike in with you! We would cut our way through these base plebeians, as through so many children."

"Look you, senors," said Ronald, "'tis madness of you to obstruct me. Our soldiers are thronging all about the village, and by a single blast on *this* I will summon a hundred men in a moment." As he spoke, he disengaged from his belt the silver whistle which, as a light infantry officer, was now part of his appointments. By this movement the folds of his plaid were raised, and the golden cross of St. James glittered before the eyes of the Spaniards, whose favour was instantly won by the sight of the well-known Spanish badge of military achievement. They fell back right and left, and the passage was free. De Mesmai, vowing vengeance against them, departed with his deliverer, who soon got him attired in other clothing, which, though somewhat motley, was preferable to the rags he had lately worn.

Adjourning to a *taberna*, kept by an old Jewess, they partook of an *olla podrida*,—a mess composed of fragments of fowl, flesh, and various

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ingredients stewed together, an excellent dish, when well spiced and seasoned, and one that is considered very substantial and nourishing by the Spaniards. For this, and a stoup of very sour wine, the conscientious *patrona* charged Ronald two duros.

After this they parted. Ronald had to take command of the escort of the regimental baggage, and De Mesmai was sent to the rear-guard, with whom some other prisoners of war marched. The unfortunate cuirassier, with true French volubility, gave Stuart a profusion of thanks for his kindness, and departed, swearing by the bomb that he would make his escape on the first opportunity which offered. This threat he executed two days afterwards, near Talavera de la Reina, when the division was on its march; and, aided by some Spaniards in the French interest, he gained Andalusia in safety, and rejoined Marshal Soult's army at Cordova.

After passing through a variety of towns and villages, the troops of Sir Rowland Hill, on the 29th of September, beheld before them the famous and venerable city of Toledo—of old the populous and wealthy capital of Spain, once so celebrated for its magnificence and glory, of which, alas! so little now remains. The appearance of the dark city, illumined by the glow of the setting sun, which bathed in purple every thing that its rays fell upon, formed a new and agreeable object to the brigades, as they emerged in succession from the rich groves and cool vine-trellises that, bending under purple grapes, had for miles and miles overshadowed their line of march, and echoed to the music of the thirty regimental bands. A cheer arose from the advanced-guard when they came in sight of Toledo. Situated amidst the most delightful and romantic scenery, it crowns the summit of a rocky eminence, around which runs its girdle of walls and battlemented towers, circled on three sides by the Tagus, which, reflecting the hue of the sky, was now wandering like a river of blood among gloomy trees, sylvan ravines, and rocky places, adding greatly to the singular beauty of the surrounding country. The roofs of the houses, which are generally about five or six stories high, were seen shining in the sun above the serrated lines of the ramparts; and rearing high above all rose the enormous Gothic tower and spire of the ancient cathedral, the red sky appearing between pinnacle and buttress, flying arch and traceried window, giving a peculiar appearance of lightness and richness to the huge dark mass. The opinion formed by the soldiers on first viewing Toledo was changed on entering it, and seeing the close, crooked, desolate, and filthy alleys which branch off in every direction.

A very handsome street, where the cathedral stands, and which leads to the great square, is, or was, the principal one in the city, and was kept tolerably well paved and clean. But everything which meets the eye announces decay, and attests that trade, commerce, wealth, and glory have departed from Toledo. The population, which once exceeded two hundred thousand souls, has now sunk to about one-eighth of that number.

At the city gate the troops were met by a number of the Spanish nobility and their attendants on horseback, followed by crowds of the citizens, who received them with loud acclamations. The alcaldes, headed by the governor, El Medico, a fierce guerilla chief, appeared at the archway, attired in their robes of scarlet, and attended by halberdiers and alguazils dressed in short black cloaks and doublets, and wearing broad hats, from beneath which their long hair hung down on

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their jagged lace collars. Numerous bands of ecclesiastics, chanting as they came, and bearing banner, cross, and smoking chalice, were likewise in attendance. Above their dark masses were borne aloft the dressed-up images of the Virgin, Santa Casilda, and San Ildefonso, of whom so many legends are told in Toledo. These affairs, fluttering with rich drapery and blazing with jewels, displayed all that singular mixture of mummery, religion, and *effect*, which is so much studied in the rites of the church of Rome.

In the name of King Ferdinand of Spain, as his representative, and of the alcades and citizens of Toledo as their governor, El Medico welcomed Sir Rowland Hill and the soldiers of the *fighting division* to the ancient capital of Spain, in a speech of wonderful length and pomposity.

As the brigades marched through the city, the joyous acclamations of the people, the tolling of bells, the chant of the priests, the din and uproar, the reiterated cheers and shouts of "Long live Ferdinand the Seventh! Long live the brave British nation! *Viva, Don Rowland Hill, viva!*" resounding on all sides, almost drowned the music of the bands and tramp of the marching feet. Even Ranald-dhu, the piper-major of the Gordon Highlanders, with his six colleagues, had to blow their bags up with might and main before they could make themselves heard. The martial, yet wild-looking garb of the 92nd attracted great attention, and a dense crowd of staring Spaniards squeezed along on the flanks of the regiment, accompanying it through all the streets. The Highland garb was a new sight to the citizens of Toledo, who, although they had heard of the bare-kneed Scottish regiments, with whose valour all Spain was ringing, they now beheld one of them within the walls of the city for the first time. The remarkable appearance of Dugald Mhor, with his snowy tresses and blue bonnet, marching close to the colonel's side, elicited many a shout of wonder; but the old Gael was too much accustomed to be distinguished thus, and cared nothing about it, as he strode on with his long claymore swinging at his thigh, and his brass target slung on his back. What the latter, with its brass studs and steel pike could be, it was impossible for the Spaniards to conjecture: but they imagined it to be some unmeaning badge of office, like the gold-stick of the Guards, and concluded that Dugald was some very important personage among the strangers. The windows and terraced tops of the houses were crowded with people, and the balconies overlooking the streets were filled with ladies, who kissed their white hands, waved their veils, and tossed bouquets of flowers, and even their little gloves, to the officers, crying ever and anon—"*Long live Sir Rowland Hill! Sus valiente caballeros y soldados, viva!*"

The balconies were decorated with garlands of flowers, quilts, carpets, and pieces of ancient tapestry; the banners of noble families, of corporations, and of Spain, waved from the windows amid gaudy pennons and streamers of every kind. Hurrah! it was indeed a magnificent scene of joy, noise, and uproar. Every man wearing the red coat was the friend of the Spaniard; and even the wearied little drum-boy, lugging along his drum, was a hero and a deliverer of Spain. That night solemn prayers for the success of the British arms were offered up in the great cathedral. The outside of its dome and spire were blazing with myriads of variegated lamps, and the town was illuminated with great splendour. The lighted-up spire presented a most singular

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appearance for leagues around. Rising from the glittering city, it stood like a vast column of fire against the dusky sky, causing the windings of the Tagus to gleam afar off, from the savage defiles and deep gorges through which it wanders. The soldiers were billeted on the inhabitants of the city, within the walls; and the general, with his staff, was received into the mansion of the governor, El Medico.

The Highlanders and the left wing of an English regiment (the 66th, I believe) were quartered in the mouldering palace of the ancient kings of Castile, the Alcanzar, a building which has since degenerated into a house of refuge for the poor. In the evening, the theatre was thronged with officers of the division, the ladies, and all fashionable people in the town, to witness the representation of a new piece. It was entitled *The Plains of Salamanca*, and composed by a young student of Toledo, in honour of the late victory obtained by the British arms. Between the acts or *jornados*, the bands of the 34th regiment and of the Highlanders occupied the orchestra, and played a number of Spanish airs, in compliment to the audience.

A comic opera, called the *Tonadilla*, closed the amusements of the evening. It was performed by a single person, a young and pretty actress, who sang, in a remarkably sweet voice, a long story, or ballad, full of drollery, love-adventures, and gallantry, drawing loud applause and astounding *vivas* from the audience, with whom she appeared to be a decided favourite, the stage being strewed with the chaplets and bouquets of flowers tossed to her by cavaliers from the boxes and pit.

Certainly the whole performance did not impress the British portion of the audience with a very high opinion of the state of the Spanish theatre. The house was small, ill-constructed, ill-fitted up, and ill-lighted with a few oil-lamps, the nauseous fumes of which, mixed with those of oranges, cigars, and garlic, rendered the atmosphere very far from pure. The scenes were daubs, the attire of the actors rags, and the play destitute of talent; but the beauty of the bright-eyed ladies in the boxes, the pretty actress with her *tonadilla*, and the martial music in the orchestra, were sufficient to counterbalance other drawbacks and defects.

Sir Rowland's division lay two days in Toledo. On the evening before they marched, Ronald made a tour of the city to view all worth seeing. After visiting the famous sword manufactory, which yet flourishes as of old, he bent his steps towards the cathedral, the doors of which (like those of all continental churches) stood open day and night. It was almost dark when he entered it, and the appearance of that vast temple, when involved in gloom and mystery, is fully calculated to impress the mind with holy sadness, with pure veneration, and with awe. The pale light of the moon and stars, twinkling through eighty-six tinted and traceried windows, glimmered alternately on the scores of massive and magnificent columns that upheld the lofty roof, and showing them where the perspective of "the long-drawn aisles" vanished away in darkness and obscurity. Six tall candles twinkled before the dark painting on the altar, and many holy tapers gleamed fitfully in far recesses before the shrines and images of Eugenius, Casilda, Ildefonso, Leocadia, and other favourite saints of Toledo, before which many a solitary devotee knelt on the cold pavement in earnest prayer.

The dark figures of monks and cavaliers,—the latter in broad hats

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and long cloaks, were gliding noiselessly about, adding greatly to the general effect of the scene. They moved like shadows: scarcely a footfall was heard as they trod lightly on the carved stones, beneath which sleep many a king and queen of fair Castile,—many a proud grandee and redoubtable warrior.

After endeavouring to decipher by the dim light of a neighbouring shrine the pompous inscriptions on the marble tombs of the great Don Alvar de Luna, Cardinal Mendoza, and others, Ronald turned to leave the place, his mind filled with admiration and enthusiasm at its vastness, grandeur, solemnity, and magnificence. As he passed down one of the side aisles, indulging in a train of these fine sentiments, they were cut short, somewhat abruptly, by a person coming violently against him in the dark.

"Sir, you are very unceremonious," cried Ronald angrily, feeling for his sword. "What do you mean by coming against me thus rudely?"

"I believe I may, without injustice, ask the same question of you," answered a familiar voice; and as they advanced from between the columns into the light of a shrine, Ronald beheld with surprise the face of Louis Lisle.

"I did not expect you so very suddenly, and especially here at Toledo," said he, dubious in what manner to greet his old friend, whose features became at once clouded by the cold and stern expression which they had generally worn of late, especially since the hour in which he beheld the interview between Stuart and Catalina in the cottage at Almarez. "You have made expedition in your march from Lisbon."

"I arrived here about two hours ago, with a detachment of convalescents from Belem. You are aware that the division marches at sunrise to-morrow; so I wish to see the cathedral before leaving Toledo," and turning coldly, he was about to move off.

"Louis Lisle," exclaimed Ronald, suddenly and fiercely, as he strode before and intercepted him, while all his long pent-up indignation broke forth uncontrollably; "halt, sir! You shall not stir one pace from the spot until I have spoken with you. We must come to an explanation; my own honour demands it. Whence is it, that you treat me in this studied, cold, and insolent manner, and have ever done so since that hour in which we met on the plain at La Nava?"

"Recall to mind your conduct on that occasion, and I presume you are sufficiently answered," was the cold reply.

"Lisle—Lisle!" exclaimed Ronald bitterly, "when children, when youths at home in our own country among the woods of Inchavon and Lochisla, we were constant companions and friends,—brothers in all but blood. Oh! why should it be otherwise now?"

"Ask that question of yourself, sir,—ask of your own false heart!" replied Louis, proudly and indignantly.

"Fury! Were you not the brother—"

"Stay, Mr. Stuart; I am not accustomed to be addressed in these thundering tones."

"Diaoul, Mr. Lisle! I am at a loss to understand what you mean," exclaimed Ronald, his wrath increasing. "Did you not, during the retreat into Portugal, and the advance again from Castello Branca into Spanish Estremadura, treat me with singular hauteur and coldness? so

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much so, that it has been remarked by the whole regiment,—ay, even the brigade?"

"I acknowledge that *I have*, Mr. Stuart," said Lisle, drawing himself up to his full height, and setting his bonnet haughtily on one side.

"Death and fury, Louis!" exclaimed Stuart, regardless of awakening a thousand echoes; "and for what has this been the cause?"

"I repeat to you again—search your own heart; the cause lies there."

"Blasted be my heart if I ask it of any but yourself!" replied Ronald, his hot Highland blood fully roused. "As I hope to live, but *one* consideration—*one* remembrance alone stays my hand from seeking the usual satisfaction—ay, even in this cathedral. Ha! surely this marked change of conduct and manner towards an old companion and brother-soldier, cannot be in consequence of Sir Allan Lisle's obtaining the peerage, so long dormant?"

"Ronald Stuart," exclaimed the other, with a scornful smile, "you might know me better than to imagine I could be swayed by ideas so very childish and extremely silly. I have been forbearing towards you as mortal man could be; but permit me now to tell you, that you, Ronald Stuart, have behaved most cruelly, faithlessly, and basely to one, whose name my lips shall never utter in your presence and hearing."

"Basely! Louis—Louis—"

"Well do you know whom I mean!" interrupted the other with increasing vehemence; "she is inseparably connected with the memory of your native place. Her you have falsely forgotten,—and why, Heaven only knows,—forming attachments here among Spaniards and strangers, while her heart has never wandered from you."

"Lisle! what is this you tell me now?"

"Truth, and the feelings of an enraged yet sorrowing heart! for I have long mourned in secret your fickleness and inconstancy—as God is my hearer, Ronald, I have! I deemed that your hearts were entwined together in such wise that nought but death could sever them; but I have been mistaken. I believe the predictions of old Cavers, our nurse, when she warned the poor girl to beware of you, are now fulfilled. Your mother was one of the Monteiths of Cairntowis, and the perfidy of the race appears to be renewed in yourself,—even at this late period."

"You speak strangely, Lisle, and in riddles. You cannot mean to insult me openly, by this allusion to my mother's honourable and ancient family? I can forget and forgive—"

"Pshaw! I supposed so."

"How, Mr. Lisle!" exclaimed Ronald, with renewed fury. "You cannot suppose for an instant that I am—Heavens! must I name it—a coward?"

"No, Stuart; a coward never came of your race, as my ancestors have often known to their cost. The cross which at this moment glitters on your breast reminds me that you would not shrink from any earthly danger; therefore do not suppose that my indignation will lead me to be unjust."

"Your sister—Alice; of her I would speak."

"Never let her name pass your lips!" exclaimed the other, as if the

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very sound of it roused him to frenzy. "You have destroyed her, and almost broken her too sensitive—too gentle—and too confiding heart; but I will revenge her, Stuart, by the powers of Heaven I will! and you shall hear from me by daybreak. For this night, I defy and spit upon you!"

He rushed from the cathedral, leaving Ronald transfixed with rage and amazement.

END OF FIRST SERIES.

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THE

ROMANCE OF WAR:

OR,

THE HIGHLANDERS IN SPAIN.

BY

JAMES GRANT, ESQ.,

Late 62nd Regiment.

(AUTHOR OF THE SCOTTISH CAVALIER, &c.)

"In the garb of old Gaul, with the fire of old Rome,
From the heath-covered mountains of Scotia we come;
Our loud-sounding pipe breathes the true martial strain,
And our hearts still the old Scottish valour retain."

LT. GEN. ERSKINE.

SECOND SERIES.

LONDON:
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & CO., SOHO SQUARE.

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THE ROMANCE OF WAR.

CHAPTER I.

HOSTILITIES.—A LOVE LETTER.

BOILING with rage at Louis's insulting defiance, Ronald returned to his quarters in the Alcanzar, determined at daybreak to summon him forth, to fight or apologize. He often repeated the words, "Her heart has never wandered from you." Ah! if this should indeed be the case, and that Alice loved him after all! But from Louis his honour demanded a full explanation and ample apology, either of which he feared the proud spirit of the other would never stoop to grant. Yet, to level a deadly weapon against the brother of Alice,—against him to whom he had been a constant friend and companion in childhood and maturer youth, and perhaps by a single shot to destroy him, the hopes and the peace of his amiable father and sister, he felt that should this happen, he never could forgive himself. But there was no alternative; it was death or dishonour.

Two ways lay before him,—to fight or not to fight: and his sense of injured honour made him, without hesitation, choose the first, and he waited in no ordinary anxiety for the dawn, when Alister Macdonald, who was absent on duty, would return to the quarters of the regiment.

Next morning, when the grey daylight was beginning faintly to show the dark courts and gloomy arcades of the Alcanzar, he sprung from his couch, which had been nothing else than his cloak laid on the polished floor tiles; and undergoing a hasty toilette, he was about to set forth in search of Macdonald, when Lieutenant Chisholm, one of the officers, entered.

"What! up already, Stuart?" said he; "I hope you are not on any duty?"

"No. Why?"

"Because Lisle has asked me to wait upon you."

"Upon *me?*" asked Ronald, with a frown of surprise. "Upon me, Chisholm?"

"Yes; of course you will remember what occurred in the cathedral last night?"

"How could I ever forget? Mr. Lisle, under its roof, insulted me most grossly," replied Ronald, his lips growing white with anger. "I was just about to seek Macdonald to give him a message, but Mr. Lisle has anticipated me."

"For Heaven's sake, Stuart, let us endeavour to settle this matter amicably! Think of the remorse which an honourable survivor must always feel. A hundred men slain in action are nothing to one life lost in a duel."

"Address these words to your principal,—they are lost on me; but you are an excellent fellow, Chisholm!"

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"It is long since we have had an affair of this sort among us, and Cameron is quite averse to this mode of settling disputes."

"I shall not consult his opinion, or that of any other man, in defence of my own honour," said Ronald haughtily.

"As you please," replied the other, with an air of pique: "Lisle and you have long been on very distant terms, and the officers have always predicted that the matter would terminate in this way."

"Curse their impertinent curiosity! And so Lisle calls me out in consequence of the high words we exchanged in the cathedral last night?"

"That is one reason—the least one, I believe. He mentioned that his sister, Miss Lisle—"

"Stay, Chisholm! I will hear no more of this," cried Stuart; then suddenly changing his mind, added, "Ah! well; his sister—Miss Alice Lisle. Go on."

"Faith, Stuart, you seem confoundedly confused. Do settle this matter in peace. Lisle has told me the story, in confidence, and I think you have been to blame,—indeed you have. Send Lisle an apology, for I assure you he is boiling with passion, and will not yield a hair's breadth."

"Chisholm, then how in the devil's name can you suppose that I will?" exclaimed Ronald, his anger getting the better of his confusion. "Never, by Heaven! never will I apologize when I have suffered the indignity. He has challenged me, and fate must now decide. I will meet him."

"Well, then, time presses; we march at sunrise. Who is your friend?"

"Alister Macdonald, if he has returned; if not, I shall have Logan."

"Macdonald returned about midnight with some stragglers from Torrijos, and will not relish being disturbed so early."

"Never mind that; an hour's sleep less or more is scarcely to be considered when lives are in jeopardy. Where is the meeting-place?"

"The bridge of Toledo. You will barely be in time. Six is the hour; it wants fifteen minutes of it by my watch."

"Well, you may leave me now."

Knowing it was needless to say any more about a reconciliation, Chisholm departed; and Ronald, after buckling on his sword and dirk, stood for a few minutes holding his bonnet in his hand irresolutely, while he sunk into a reverie of deep and bitter reflections, of what his affectionate old sire and faithful dependants at Lochisla would feel should he die by the hand of Lisle, whose very name they regarded with so much jealousy and distrust. He also thought of Alice and Lord Lisle, what their sentiments would be if the reverse was the case, and the one lost a dear brother—the other a beloved son, who was the only heir and hope of an ancient house, and the successor to its title. He remembered also the words of Louis. Could it be that Alice might yet love him? But no; that was impossible! He threw his cloak around him, and rushed from the chamber to seek that of Macdonald, who was ready to attend him in a moment. Suddenly remembering that he had no pistols, he turned into an apartment occupied by Major Campbell, to request the loan of his.

It was a spacious and splendid room, with a ceiling twenty feet in height. A colonnade supported the roof, the carved beams of which stretched across from the gilded cornices on each side. The ceiling and walls were covered with frescoes, but the plaster and the once bright and gorgeous gilding were miserably faded and dilapidated by time and neglect. Rolled in his cloak, and coiled up in a corner of this vast and empty hall, the bulky frame of Campbell lay on the tessellated pavement, and no doubt he found it a bed somewhat cold and hard. His pillow was formed by his long Andrea and favourite *rung*, with a plaid rolled round them. His dirk and steel Highland pistols lay on one side of him, and an empty

pigskin on the other. Very desolate indeed he appeared, lying in a corner of that huge apartment, which was totally destitute of furniture. Ronald shook him by the shoulder.

"If that is you, Serjeant Macilduui," said he, speaking very crossly beneath the cape of his cloak, "I must beg leave to inform you that I have nothing to do now with No. 1 company. I am done with all that sort of dirty work, as you will see by the last *Gazette*. Apply to Mr. Kennedy, and take yourself off till the drum beats. I wish the infernal Horse Guards would order six halting days every week, instead of only Sunday and Thursday."

"Look up, major! 'Tis I—Stuart."

"What is the matter?" cried the other, bolting up, and showing that the contents of the borachio-skin were operating still on his brain; "what is the matter now? It is very hard that a field-officer, and one too that has seen the fields of Alexandria, Egmont-op-Zee, and the onslaught of Copenhagen, should be so pestered by subalterns. How this hard bed makes my bones ache! I have slept softer on the hot yellow sand in Egypt. They tell me this was the bed-room of Don Alfonso the First, king of Castile. Devil mend him! I suppose he did not sleep on the pavement with a claymore for a pillow, like Colin Campbell, of Craigfianteech, in Lorne, a better man—for what is any Castilian don when compared to a duine-wassal of Argyle?" The major snapped his fingers, and it was evident he was very tipsy. "But what do you want, Ronald, my boy?" he added.

"The loan of your pistols, major, for ten minutes only. I have a very disagreeable affair to adjust this morning."

"I regret to hear it; but it is with none of ours, I hope, my knight of Santiago?"

"This is no time for jesting. 'Tis with a Portuguese of Colonel Campbell's brigade," said Ronald, colouring at the necessary falsehood.

"Pah! only a Portuguese,—a dirty, garlic-eating devil. There are the pistols; and remember, always level low, and fire the instant the word is given. I hope your arm is steady. A little hartshorn-water, or Eau de Cologne, are excellent things to rub it with. I am sorry I never keep any of these things about me: Egypt cured me of them. Take Stewart, the assistant-surgeon, with you, and come back when the tulzie is over, and give me an account of it."

"You forget, major. I may never come back."

"And your opponent a Portuguese! Who is your second?"

"Macdonald,—Macdonald of Inchkenneth. These pistols are very handsome," observed Ronald, with affected carelessness, as he examined the stones with which they were studded, and surveyed the flints and locks.

"Ah! they are indeed handsome. My grandfather took them out of the Duke of Douglas's belt, after he had unhorsed him at Shirramuir. They did some execution at Culloden, too."

"On the right side, of course?"

"Yes; in the army of the Prince. Use this one, with the cairn-gorum on the butt. The other throws high, and you would need to level to the boot to hit the belt. It happened so with me at Grand Cairo, when firing at a Turkish thief. I aimed at his sash, and the ball knocked off his turban. I would tell you all the story, but there is no time. I have no fear of you; so be off, my lad. God bless you! and steady your hand. Do not let it be said that a Portuguese gained and kept the ground before a Scotsman, and one of the Gordon Highlanders."

At the gate of the Alcanzar he met Macdonald, and, wrapping them-

selves up in their cloaks, as the morning air was cold and chilly, they hurried towards the bridge of Toledo. The streets appeared gloomy and dull in the grey light of the morning, and save their own footfalls no other sound broke the silence. The most public places were absolutely deserted. The shops under the piazzas of the Plaza, the stalls in the market-place, the *cafés* and *tabernas* were still all closed. Two or three halberdiers stood at the gate of El Medico's residence, and these were all they met, save a cloaked cavalier, who by a ladder of ropes suddenly descended from the window into the street, and disappeared.

On reaching the bridge which spans the Tagus, immediately beneath the cannon and battlements of the city, they found Lisle and Chisholm awaiting them. A pistol-case lay on the parapet over which they were leaning, watching the smooth waters of the river as they hurried on between rocky ledges, banks overhung with foliage, and willow-trees that flourished amidst the stream. A thick white mist was beginning to curl up from the bed of the river, exhaled by the increasing heat of the morning sun, whose rays were tinging the east with red, and the cross on the beautiful spire of the cathedral, from one of the towers of which waved a broad and crimson banner, bearing the arms of Toledo—the imperial crown of Spain.

"A very disagreeable business this, Macdonald," whispered Chisholm, as he took the arm of the other, and led him aside to the parapet of the bridge, where they communed for a few seconds, leaving the principals, awkwardly enough, to stare at each other or admire the scenery, whichever they chose.

Another attempt at an amicable arrangement was made, but without success; both parties were too much exasperated to yield in the least degree. "Once more I ask you, Stuart," said Chisholm, coming forward, "cannot this unhappy affair be adjusted without recourse to arms?"

"You are a good-hearted fellow, Chisholm, and I fully appreciate your good intentions, but your words are lost upon me; I refer you to Mr. Lisle for an answer. Mine was the insult, and any apology should therefore come from him."

"It shall not!" exclaimed Lisle, bitterly; "I will rather die than apologize. Stuart, you *shall* fight me; and if not—"

"Lisle,—Lisle! your behaviour is very violent and most unjustifiable."

"I am the best judge, Mr. Macdonald. I fight in the cause of another, and not for myself," said Louis, and he turned haughtily on his heel, and again walked to the parapet.

"I am perfectly disposed to accept of an apology," observed Ronald to the seconds, in a subdued voice; "but as one will not be given, on Lisle's own head will rest the guilt of the blood shed this morning. This quarrel has been of his own seeking, not mine. Heaven knows how loath I am to fight with him, but there is no alternative now. Measure the ground, and give us our weapons."

"Then, Macdonald," said Chisholm, "all hopes of an accommodation are at an end?"

"Quite: your principal is much to blame. But we must be expeditious, —see how red the horizon is; the drums will beat in ten minutes."

During the measuring of the ground and the loading of the pistols, Ronald fixed his eyes on the saffron east, where the sun was about to rise in all its splendour above the mountains of Castile. Appearing black between him and the glowing sky rose the grassy height, crowned by the black old ruins of the castle of San Servan, that fortress so famous in romance, where "Ruy, the Cid Campeador," was wont to spend the night in prayer and vigil. The sky was seen through its embrasured towers and empty windows, brightening in a blaze of glory all around, and giving

promise of another day. Ronald gazed eastward wistfully. In ten minutes more the sun would be up, but by that time the eyes of either Lisle or himself might be sealed for ever. Ronald pictured what would be the emotions of Alice if her brother was slain, because she loved him well. He thought of his father, too; and remembered painfully that he would almost exult if young Lisle was slain in this contest.

His reverie was interrupted by Alister.

"All is ready,—Lisle has taken his ground," said he, putting into Ronald's hand the cold steel butt of the Highland pistol. "For Heaven's sake, or rather your own, appear a little more collected. Lisle seems determined to shoot you, in revenge for your neglect of his sister."

"You have mentioned the only thing which can unnerve and unman me. Chisholm has told you, I suppose?"

"Yes. An explanation might yet clear up this business."

"I scorn to ask it now!"

"Are you ready?" cried Chisholm, who had posted Lisle fourteen paces off.

"All ready."

"Stand aside, Macdonald. I believe that I must give the word."

"As you please." Alister retired, but, like Chisholm's, his heart was filled with a painful feeling of suspense and dread.

The fatal word was given, and the report of both pistols instantaneously followed. Ronald fired into the air, but reeled backwards a few paces and sunk on the roadway. Louis's stern look immediately relaxed, and he rushed towards him, tossing wildly away the other pistol.

"Heaven be merciful and look down on me, I have killed him! O, Stuart, Ronald Stuart! speak to me," and he knelt over him with all the remorse that a brave and generous heart is capable of feeling, after the gust of passion has passed away.

"The ball has passed through his breast," whispered Macdonald, in an agitated tone. "Unclasp the plaid, and open his coat. There is no blood; it must be flowing internally."

These observations, though made unintentionally, added greatly to the distress of Louis Lisle; but the unclasping of the shoulder-belt, the undoing of the sash, the plaid, and yellow riband of his gorget, aroused Ronald, who, to their great surprise, rose slowly to his feet.

"Why, what are you all about, unharnessing me thus? I am not wounded; but I have received a devil of a shock. By a perfect miracle I have been saved."

"One I shall ever bless!" said Lisle, pressing his hand.

"How is this?" exclaimed Chisholm, in astonishment; "the ball has glanced off and torn your coat, as if you wore a corslet under it."

"By Jove! the miniature has saved him. He wears one: I used to quiz him about it at Merida," said Macdonald, as he pulled open the yellow lappel of the regimental coat, and displayed the little portrait hung around his neck by a chain. "You perceive that the silver case has turned the ball, which has become flattened against the parapet yonder. Such a very narrow escape!"

"The miniature! how comes this to pass?" asked Lisle. "Have you still preserved and worn it thus, notwithstanding your change of sentiments?"

"Listen to me, Lisle. I vow to you by Heaven and my honour, that my sentiments are yet unchanged: they are the same as in that hour when I first received this miniature from your own hand; and from that time until this I have continually worn it near my heart, preserving it carefully

and preciously as any monk does here the piece of wood which he considers a part of the true cross. Never yet have I parted with this relic for a moment, although I own that I was on the point of destroying it when I first received intimation of the intended alliance between the Earl of Hyndford and your sister, Miss Lisle,—an alliance probably formed by this time."

"The Earl of Hyndford!" exclaimed Louis, in a tone of astonishment. "Has that accursed and silly report been the cause of our long alienation and quarrelling? Hyndford,—I had forgotten that affair altogether, or never supposed it could have reached you here in Spain. We have both been cruelly mistaken, but all will be happiness again. Give me your hand, Stuart, and we will be friends and brothers as of yore. Your heart is still unchanged, and I pledge you my honour that the affections of Alice are yours as much as ever. But this hostile meeting must be concealed from her, otherwise we should never be forgiven. Our seconds will never speak of the matter; their honour is a sufficient warrant for their secrecy."

Further conversation, and the congratulations of Chisholm and Macdonald, were cut short by the drums beating, and they were all compelled to hurry off. Lisle took the arm of Ronald, and they went towards the muster-place by a different route from that pursued by their seconds, so that they might freely converse and give scope to their thoughts. A most agreeable revulsion of feeling had taken place in their minds.

"O Ronald Stuart! I have been much to blame in this business," said Lisle, "much to blame indeed. And can you forgive me?"

"Freely, Louis," replied the other, pressing his hand. "I admire the spirit with which you have perilled life and limb for the cause of Alice. And so the dear girl is yet true?"

"True as the sun! But I was infuriated,—almost maddened by your seeming indifference. It now flashes upon my mind that you mentioned Lord Hyndford in our unlucky quarrel at La Nava. Until this hour I had forgotten that; and probably but for our mountain pride and Scottish stubbornness, we might have come to a satisfactory explanation twelve months ago. What a deal of bitter feeling the paragraph of that wretched newspaper has occasioned! But that is all at an end, and now, thank Heaven! we will no longer greet each other like hostile clansmen, with gloomy and averted eyes, as our sires did of yore. In all her letters to me Alice has deplored that for twelve months past you have broken off all correspondence with her,—indeed never having written once since you left Lochisla; and my excuses appear to have been very unsatisfactory to her."

"I feared that my letters might fall into Sir Allan's hands, and excite his displeasure. And afterwards our quarrel at La Nava appeared to confirm my suspicions—"

"Say no more of them. I have in my possession a letter from her to you. I was intrusted with it on leaving home; but so great was the irritation I felt from our meeting at La Nava, that instead of delivering it, it has lain in my baggage until this hour,—nearly a whole year."

"Cruel and foolish! Ah, Lisle! how could you be so vindictive? Doubtless it would have unravelled this matter."

"You know not by what indignant sentiments I was prompted. Pride hardened my heart, for I loved Alice dearly; but, Stuart, I have heard some strange stories whispered at our mess-table, in which your name was entwined with that of a certain Donna Catalina. You change countenance."

"Poor Villa Franca; she was indeed a very beautiful woman, and I will acknowledge that, jealous and irritated as I was at Alice's supposed desertion, I yielded greatly to the charms of the noble Spanish lady; but I swear to you, Louis, that Alice—Alice alone, is the only being, the only woman

I have ever truly loved! How much I long to behold this letter, and read the words her white hand has traced, although so many months ago!"

"Gentlemen, the regiment has fallen in," said the serjeant-major, breathlessly overtaking the loiterers. "The adjutant sent me to look for you, Mr. Lisle. You are to carry the king's colour to-day, sir." They hurried off.

Ronald derived the most exquisite pleasure from this reconciliation with his old friend; and it was alone equalled by the delightful idea that Alice yet loved him, and was the same gentle, winning, and blooming creature as ever,—and would yet be his, when all the perils of campaigning were past. Eagerly he longed for an opportunity to write: and what a deal he had to tell her,—of love and war, of future happiness, and mutual tenderness!

The long-detained letter of Alice could not be procured from the depths of Lisle's baggage-trunks, until the halt at the ruinous little town of Villa Mayor. Although the march was only twelve miles, and lay along the left bank of the Tagus, among the most beautiful scenery,—wood and water, rocks and ruins, fields and vineyards,—it appeared to Ronald the longest and most wearisome he had ever performed. As soon as he received the letter from Louis, he rushed away to a secluded nook or bower of orange-trees, by the river side, and prepared to con it over in secret. He hastily kissed and broke the seal, which bore the crest of the Monteiths of Cairntowis, with the motto *Keepe tryste*. Ronald knew the signet ring of his mother, which he had given to Alice when he bade her adieu in the lawn before Inchavon-house.

"Inchavon, Perthshire, 10th December, 1811.

"My Dearest Ronald,

"Louis has already sent you no less than three letters, addressed to the regiment *viâ* Edinburgh and Lisbon, but, alas! we have never yet received any answer, and I fear that none of them have reached you. I know not how the posts are arranged in Spain, but I am afraid that all our letters have miscarried, as you must have written Louis and me many by this time. This one I send in the care of my dear brother, who leaves us to-morrow to join your regiment. Ah! I shall be very lonely without him, and shall weep long and bitterly when he is gone. I shall have no one then to whom I can impart my thoughts, or speak of you; and my tears and anxiety will be redoubled, when you are both exposed to the dangers of war. Since you left Perthshire, I have never heard of a victory without weeping, and I dare not read the lists of 'killed, wounded, and missing,' lest the name of one should be there,—one on whom my thoughts ever dwell as their dearest treasure. I cannot look at the paper, which a servant brings every morning from Perth on horseback, but I sit breathlessly, in fear and trembling watching the face of papa, as he reads them over at breakfast. O goodness guide me, Ronald! my anxiety and pain, lest his features should change, are indeed beyond description. How drearily the days have passed since you left us; and I generally spend them in wandering among the places you and Louis loved best. And—but enough of this: I must not make my letter a dismal one. Louis some time ago appeared at the Perth ball in the uniform of the Gordon Highlanders; and I assure you that all the young ladies were quite in love with him, fairly touched with the scarlet fever. He outshone the militia, yeomanry, and even the gay tartans of Highland gentlemen from the hills. How well a gay uniform looks in a ball-room! and such a flutter it creates in the hearts of the young ladies! I believe you soldiers would be very arrogant fellows, if you really knew what we think you. But, as Mrs. Centlivre says, 'There's something so jaunty in a soldier;—a kind of *je ne sais quoi* air, that makes

them more agreeable than all the rest of mankind.' If this is the case, we are to be excused for being subdued by the gay epaulet.

"Lord Hyndford has been down here residing with us for some time past, enjoying the grouse-shooting with papa. He is a very nice old gentleman, with white hair and a purple face,—the last occasioned, I suppose, by his drinking so much of port; for every day after dinner he takes for his share a bottle of papa's own 'particular.' He has become very peculiar and marked in his attentions to me of late, (the idea of the thing!) and, dear Ronald, it would almost make you jealous, could you but see him hanging over me with a sentimental expression on his droll old face, when I am playing on the harp or piano. But I love to tease him, and always sing,

"'He's coming frae the north that's to marry me,
He's coming frae the north that's to marry me;
A feather in his bonnet, and the kilt aboon his knee:
He's a bonnie Highland laddie,—but you are no he.'

"Indeed he annoys me very much, as I cannot be troubled with his attentions, and you know I never flirt. In this affair, that which annoyed me most was a notice which appeared in a newspaper about his proposals to me. Such horrid prying creatures those news-people are! But the editor came here to Inchavon, and made so many apologies, that he got off free, although papa had threatened to horsewhip him. But I shall soon be rid of Hyndford, as the grouse-shooting ends to-day; and he must soon go to Edinburgh, to attend a meeting of Scots peers at Holyrood.

"Your father, poor man, must feel very lonely now without you, especially as he lives so far up the glen, in that dreary old tower, surrounded by heather hills, water, and rocks. I wish greatly that papa and he were good friends; but he is so very proud, and so very distant, that I see no chance of its ever coming about. Attended by my servant, Jessie Cavers, I rode up the glen one Sunday, and went to the old kirk of Lochisla to see him; and I declare that I could with pleasure have given him a kiss for your sake, Ronald, such a noble-looking old gentleman he is! He sat in his dark old oaken pew, with his white hairs glistening in the sun, which shone through the western window, and he often bowed down his head on his huge clasped bible. It was to pray for you he did so—I am sure it was, because I saw his lips move and his eyes brighten. He never looked once towards the pew of the Corrie-oich family, with whom I sat, and so I never encountered his glance; but his fierce-looking old piper, who stood behind him, accoutred with dirk and claymore, stared at me fixedly during the whole service.

"When the aged and venerable-looking old minister prayed, first in Gaelic and then in English, for the success and safety of the British army, my heart beat earnestly and responsive to the words which fell from his withered lips. Indeed you may be sure it did.

"Whether or not papa favours the attentions of the Earl of Hyndford I do not know; but he often speaks kindly of you, and I love to listen to him when he does so. He has not forgotten that dangerous ducking at Corrie-avon. Ah! what a day of terror that one was!

"I am very busy just now, working a pair of colours for the Greek Light Infantry, the regiment of my uncle Ludovick. They are of white silk, quite covered with embroidery and needle-work. I am heartily tired of them: but Louis's old flames, the Græmes of Corrie-oich, are living with us just now, and we ply our needles from day-dawn till sunset like so many Penelopes, and the standards will soon be dancing in the breezes of the Ionian isles. When the Gordon Highlanders want a new pair of colours, you will know where to apply. With a thousand prayers for your safety, and a thousand more for your return, I must now conclude, as papa

and Hynford have just come from the moors, with six men laden with grouse-bags, and I must hurry down to the drawing-room. So believe me to be, my own dearest Ronald, yours ever, "ALICE LISLE."

"P.S. Do endeavour to send your next letters by some other way, as they must all have miscarried. Try Cadiz, or Gibraltar,—but perhaps it is impossible. Jessie Cavers, my foster-sister (who is at my side while I am writing), begs you will remind here to her 'Jo and dearie O,' a young man named Evan Iverach, who belongs to your company; and tell him, that he is not forgotten by *the* heart he has left at *hame*. "A. L."

"Alice, my own beloved Alice! and you are yet true!" exclaimed Stuart aloud, pressing the letter to his lips. "What a wretch and madman I have been to doubt you for a moment! How unworthy I am that you should condescend to write to me! Alas! oh, Alice, how much I have wronged you by my false and wicked suspicions of your truth and constancy. Ah! my own dear girl, my repentant heart turns to you more fondly by a thousand degrees than of yore." He drew forth her miniature to gaze upon it, and while doing so, let fall the letter.

"Upon my word, a most industrious creature!" said Louis Lisle, who had been standing by, as he picked it up. "She has given you no less than four closely-written pages, of a very pretty lady-like and current little hand. I have been sitting beside you for this hour past, skimming stones along the surface of the Tagus,—not a very intellectual amusement. I did not wish to interrupt you, but I thought you would never come to a halt. How often have you read this letter over?"

"Three times."

"Thrice? See what it is to be in love!"

"O Louis! how humbled and mortified I am. What shall I say to Alice when I write to her? I dare not tell the truth,—and yet, by heavens! I cannot deceive her. Is there no alternative, but to wound her feelings by a whisper of my cursed suspicions?"

"Come, my old friend, I will endeavour to make your peace; and Alice, I believe, will not be very inexorable. I am billeted on the house of the *Escrivan*, or town-clerk of this place, Villa Mayor, and there we shall have writing materials in abundance. Let us set about our correspondence, and have our letters ready for Lisbon, to be despatched by the first orderly dragoon who rides to the rear."

CHAPTER II.

THE BALL.—THE BULL-FIGHT.—AN ADVENTURE.

WITH every demonstration of joy Sir Rowland's division of the army were received by the good people of Aranjuez,* a very interesting town, which stands near the Tagus and Garama, about twenty-seven miles from Madrid, and twenty-one from Toledo. Aranjuez is surrounded by an amphitheatre of hills and green forests, and contains the celebrated summer residence of the kings of Spain; around which spread the royal gardens, justly considered the most beautiful and elegant in Europe. The town contains a Prado, or public promenade, four miles in length, which crosses the Tagus twice, by gaily-painted wooden bridges, before it loses itself among the orchards and fragrant orange thickets.

The streets of the town are perfectly regular, even monotonously so, but richly ornamented on the outside with projecting cornices, pilasters, and

* Pronounced by the Spaniards *Arunwhais*.

balconies. There is a quietness, and an air of dignity and "calm repose," about Aranjuez, which is not often met with in Spain, but which marks it as being strictly the residence of people of rank and fortune. The town contains three churches, and an area for bull-fights. The Highlanders halted in the large square, which is paved with marble, and contains the splendid brass statue of Charles the Fifth. The Emperor is represented armed cap-a-pie, trampling down heresy in the form of four arch-heretics. The statue and pedestal were decorated with flowers—indeed all the streets were strewed with them—in honour of the occasion.

Wellington, who by this time had been created a Marquis, lay before Burgos, besieging the castle, and the surrender of its garrison was looked for daily.

As the second division expected to remain some weeks at Aranjuez, they were billeted as usual on the inhabitants; and the long arrears of pay having been received, they were enabled to make themselves tolerably comfortable. The officers of the Highlanders having so much loose cash on their hands, determined to get rid of it as soon as possible, by giving a splendid ball to the ladies of Aranjuez and the officers of the division.

A committee was appointed to arrange matters, despatch the invitations, and get the palace, which, had been procured for the purpose, duly fitted up and decorated. In this princely and spacious building the Supreme Junta of the Spanish government were installed, and held their first meeting in 1808. Joseph Buonaparte occupied it previously to his retreat to Valencia, and a great quantity of his household stuffs, crystal, &c., were found in it, very opportunely, and seized by the committee to equip the supper-tables. From Madrid some thousand variegated lamps were procured to illuminate the gardens and avenues leading to the palace, and nearly twelve hundred oil-paintings, many of them by the best ancient and modern masters, were collected from different parts of the building, and hung up in the suites of apartments appropriated to the festivities. The troops entered on the 1st of October,—the ball was to be on the night of the twentieth, and of course all the unmarried ladies of Aranjuez were in a flutter,—nay, in fact, in a state of extreme excitement about the affair. The ball, the ball to be given by the Scottish officers, was the only subject discussed at the *soirées*, *tertulias*, and parties at the houses of the citizens; at the Prado, and in the *cafés* and *tabernas* in the town. The committee, which consisted of Captain Seaton, Macdonald, and Ronald Stuart, usually met every evening in the palace, to send off the invitations and discuss some of King Joseph's wine.

"I must send one of these to the young ladies of my billet," said Alister on one occasion, as they sat writing, folding, and sealing the cards at an open window, where they were luxuriating in the fragrant perfume of the gardens, smoking cigars, and sipping Volnais. "They are both young and pretty," continued Alister, "but sadly curbed in by an old maiden aunt, who regards them as very dangerous rivals."

"They are likely to prove so," said Seaton, the captain of the light company; "the girls have superb eyes and teeth. In this capital Volnais I drink to their healths, and that of the ex-king of Spain, to whom we are so much indebted for assisting us with our entertainment, by leaving his 'gudes and gear' behind him."

"Here is the name of the Condé de Truxillo," observed Macdonald, consulting the invitation-list. "Seaton, no notice appears as yet to have been sent him."

"A general invitation has been sent to the officers of his regiment. I enclosed it myself, but I have sworn to touch these matters no more.

This Volnais obscured my faculties so much yesterday, that I enclosed cards to dons which were written to donnas, to dukes that were written to plain senores, and *vice versâ*. I will leave these matters to you, Mac, and Stuart, my subaltern; while, as president of the committee, I will smoke my cigar and drink with you, so long as the Volnais lasts. *Apropos*,—push the decanters this way!"

"So the condé has left the staff," observed Stuart.

"He belongs now to the 4th Spanish Infantry; they are with De Costa's brigade."

"Here is a card for Senores the four most worshipful alcaldes of Aranjuez."

"What is the use of asking these people to a ball?" said Seaton. "Nothing more than mechanical citizens, whose blowsy wives and daughters will be intruding themselves, bedizened in the dresses of the last century."

"It is impossible to pass them over, and vulgarity may be excused in a magistrate. Here are invitations for the 10th Portuguese, for the Catalonian Caçadores, the 39th and 66th British, and all the cavalry brigades. Now, then, for the ladies."

"God bless them!"

"*Amen!* Seaton. Donna Isabel de Campo, and her four daughters. These people live near this, do they not?"

"No; in the marble square, three doors from the palace D'Alarino. Two of the light dragoons are quartered there, and a pleasant time they seem to have of it, as the five donnas spend the day in flirting, waltzing, or twanging the guitar and piano. And then mamma, although a little old and stale, is of a very gay disposition."

"A comprehensive phrase in Spain. You are a most gossiping fellow, Seaton. It is a marvel to me how you learn the history of people as you do. Don Felix Joaquin, knight of Calatrava,'* continued Alister, reading from the list.

"A base rogue," was Seaton's comment, "and one who kissed King Joseph's hand, the day before he fled to Valencia. You, as a true knight of Santiago, should certainly break his head for him, Stuart."

"Thank you: I shall not take the trouble. Read on, Macdonald."

"The very noble cavalier,—what a most unpronounceable name,—Don Zumasbul Ascasibur de Ynürritegui."

"A fellow as mad as Cuesta himself! Invite him, by all means."

"He is my *patron*," said Ronald; "a fine old fellow—a true Spaniard of the old school; and, like Cuesta, sticks to the plumed beaver and slashed doublet of his grandfather's days. Who comes next?"

"Micer Astuto Rubio, and his lady."

"Pshaw!" said Seaton, "an *abogado*; in other words, a rogue. *Astuto?* ah, he is well named; that is Spanish for craft or chicanery, of which he has as much, I believe, as any Edinburgh W.S."

"Donna Elvira Moro, *Calle Mayor*. Any scandal about her, Seaton?"

"Plenty, and to spare. The town is full of strange stories about her and her *escudero*, or gentleman-usher, an office to which she suddenly raised him from being a *moco de mulas*.† His goodly proportions pleased the eye of the widow."

"Scandal again! The Duke of Alba de T——, and his two daughters—Donna Olivia and Donna Virginia."

"Three separate cards must be sent to them," said Stuart, inditing them while he spoke.

"The duke is supposed to be a traitor, and in the French interest."

* This order still exists, and is possessed of fifty-six commanderies, and sixteen priories, in Spain.

† A mule-driver.

"I assure you, Seaton, his daughters are not," replied Ronald, writing the while. "They are very beautiful girls, and Lisle is a lucky dog to have his billet in the palace of De T——. He is continually with them, either among the gardens, riding on the Prado, or flirting at home, I believe. The young senoras are never to be seen, either at church or *la Posada de los Representes*, without their most faithful cavalier and *escudero*, the Honourable Louis Lisle."

"The mess get very little of his company just now. He never appears among us but at parade; and when the word 'dismiss' is given, he vanishes like a ghost at cock-crow. I wonder what the duke thinks of the matter?"

"I believe, Alister, he never thinks of it at all," replied Seaton. "He is too proud to hold communication with any one, and sits in his library, smoking Guadalaxara cigars and drinking sherry, from dawn till sunset, keeping every one at an awful distance."

"But his daughters—"

"Are strictly watched by an old duenna. I got a complete history of the family from my old gossiping patron. It appears that when old Mahoud takes the duke to himself, the two girls will be immensely rich. Donna Olivia, who is as gay a coquette as one can imagine, has a castle and estate of her own, lying by the banks of the Nive, on the French side of the Pyrenees. Her sister, Virginia, who has lately obtained her liberty from a convent, by the Pope's dispensation dissolving her vows, has become the leading star of Madrid and Aranjuez. By the death of her cousin, the Marquis of Montesa,—who was killed near Albuera, you will remember,—she has succeeded to large estates in Valencia—Valencia *la hermosa*,* the land of wine and olives. The fair sisters are closely besieged by all the threadbare cavaliers in the province,—fellows who trace their pedigrees beyond King Bamba's days; so that Lisle has very little chance."

"He will forget them when the route comes," said Alister. "I have been desperately in love about eight times, since we landed at the Black Horse-square in Lisbon; and Louis will get over this affair, as I have done others. The flirts of one garrison-town efface the impressions made by those of the last."

"Now and then a raw sub is meshed and caged, though!"

"Or an old field-officer, in desperation of getting a wife at all; but generally we *rough it* too much at present to find time to fall in love."

On the evening of the Highlanders' ball, all Aranjuez was in a state of commotion: myriads of lights were burning throughout the palace and royal gardens, where everything bore evidence of the good taste and expedition of the committee.

For promenading, there were set apart a long suite of rooms, extending from one wing to the other. Their floors were tessellated, and the ceilings gilded and painted in fresco, while the walls had been adorned by a thousand choice pictures, selected by the committee. These rooms had quite the appearance of an exhibition; but at intervals were hung wreaths of laurel, intermingled with festoons of tartan plaids, garlands of flowers, glittering stars of bayonets and claymores, pistols and muskets, which were reflected in many a polished mirror hung between the white marble pilasters which supported the ceilings of these splendid apartments. In every one of the long suite was a richly-carved marble mantel-piece, and on each stood a magnificent alabaster French clock. Behind rose tall mirrors, encircled by gorgeously-gilt frames, all of Paris manufacture, part of King Joseph's household stuff, abandoned by him on his hasty flight.

* The beautiful.

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The rooms were brilliantly lighted up, as indeed were the courts, arcades, and every part of the spacious palace. The large hall appropriated to the dancers was decorated like the promenade. The regimental band occupied the music-gallery, in front of which hung the yellow silk standards of the corps. The curtains of the twelve lofty windows were hung in festoons, showing the open casements and steps of white marble leading to the illuminated gardens, in the bowers of which the refreshment-tables were laid, and attended by waiters.

A Highland guard of honour, consisting of a hundred grenadiers, were drawn up in the portico, to receive, with the usual compliments, the magistrates and persons of rank; and the members of the committee might be seen hurrying through the lighted rooms in full *puff*,* dressed in their gayest uniform, ordering here and there and everywhere the servants and attendants, and getting everything in due order before the company began to arrive. About nine o'clock came the four pompous alcaldes, clad in gowns of red scarlet. Three brought their wives with them,—swarthy old ladies, wearing their hair twisted in two gigantic tails, reaching far below their waists. Each came in an old-fashioned carriage, attended behind by a couple of strapping alguazils, armed with halberts or blunderbusses. The guard of honour presented arms, the drum beat a march, and the four senores, doffing their sombreros, were ushered into an outer apartment, where Fassifern stayed to receive the company. He was dressed in full uniform, and wore his kilt and purse, instead of the *truis* and spurs of a field-officer, and his plaid of dark-green tartan was fastened to his left shoulder by a splendid silver brooch, which flashed and sparkled in the light of the lustres. After the arrival of the unfashionable alcaldes, the company continued to pour in without intermission, until the rooms were crowded. All the staff arrived about *twelve* o'clock; but the general himself, for some reason, was unable to attend.

The interior of the stately palace presented a scene of no ordinary splendour on that evening. Hundreds of uniforms of cavalry and infantry officers—British, Spanish, Portuguese, and German, were glittering everywhere. The ladies were attired in all the colours of the rainbow, and their light floating dresses were seen mingling among smart light dragoons, Scottish Highlanders, green-clad caçadores, and clumsy German riflemen, and, I must remark, that the latter were perhaps the most vulgar and ungainly fellows that ever appeared in a ball-room. There were numbers of cavaliers attired in the Spanish doublet, a close-fitting vest with sleeves. A smart mantle dangled from their left shoulder, and nearly all wore knee-breeches and broad white collars around their necks—a costume at once smart and picturesque. Many wore the garbs and badges of their national military orders: there were knights of Calatrava and Alcantara, wearing, —the former red crosses, the latter green, upon black velvet tunics; and knights of "the Band," wearing the scarlet scarf of their ancient order. But the most picturesque costumes were those of four knights of the religious order of Redemption, who appeared clad completely in white, with a large black cross on the breast of the silk tunic, which reached to the knees. A white velvet mantle flowed behind, and each wore three white feathers in a small round cap of a flat shape, like the bonnet of a Lowlander.

These singular garbs added greatly to the gaiety of the scene; but if the interior of the palace presented a blaze of splendour, the illuminated gardens were a realization of fairy-land. Two channels having been given to the Tagus, the grounds of the palace were enclosed as an island, being completely surrounded by the stream, amid which many a stately swan was

* A military cant-word for full dress.

swimming about, or slowly sailing as they spread their snowy plumage to the breeze. The trees were thickly planted on each side of the walks, and their boughs, which were beginning to wear the brown tints of autumn, embraced each other, and being carefully pruned below, formed long and beautiful sylvan arcades, such as are not to be found in any other garden in Europe. A thousand variegated lamps, clustering like enchanted fruit, were hung upon their boughs, or stretched from tree to tree in festoons, illuminating with a blaze of light the deepest recesses, where even the meridian sun could not penetrate.

White marble statues were gleaming, and the rushing waters of the famous *jets d'eau* were sparkling like showers of diamonds in the artificial light, which likewise revealed the glories of the rich parterres, where flowers of every tint, crimson and gold, purple and blue, orange and red, were yet budding and blooming in spite of the advanced time of the year. The strains of music were wafted divinely through the open casements of the hall, where the dancers were wreathed in the quadrille, or wheeled round in the giddy waltz,—the light feet of the Spanish girls gliding like those of sylphs or fairies, while their airy drapery, floating about over the marble floors, seemed like the garments of the same imaginary beings. What a strong contrast all this scene formed, when compared with the misery and discomfort which the troops had endured so long, and that which they were soon again doomed to suffer!

Like the other officers of the Highlanders, Ronald was accurately attired in full uniform, wearing his cross on his breast. His kilt, which contained ten yards of the Gordon tartan, reached to within three inches of his knee; from this the leg was bare to the swell of the calf, where his silk hose of red and white dice were gartered with knots of red ribands. A handsome brooch confined the folds of his plaid above the left epaulet, and a tasselled *sporan*, the mouth of which was hidden by a fox's head, dangled from his waist. His patron, Don Aseasibar Ynürritegui, who was attired in the dress and armed with a long Toledo of Charles the Fifth's days, had introduced him to several pretty girls, with all of whom he had danced and flirted, promenaded, handed scarfs, bouquets, and ices, and acquitted himself as a very accomplished caballero. For Louis Lisle he looked everywhere in vain: he was the only one absent.

"Where is Lisle, Alister?" asked he of Macdonald, who moved slowly past, with a fat old lady leaning on his arm. Although richly jewelled and robed, she was confoundedly ugly, and wore a white veil hanging down her broad back from a comb at least one foot six inches high. "It is very odd," continued Ronald, "that he should absent himself on this occasion."

"The Duke of Alba de T—— and his two charming daughters have not arrived yet. Louis will come with them."

"Ah! I had forgotten. I long to see those beauties of whom I have heard so much. But how is it that I have not seen you dancing to-night?"

"Tush!" whispered the other ruefully in English. "Campbell, designedly I think, introduced me to this old woman, his *patrona*,—wife of the *Contador*, or Steward of the palace. She sticks to me like a burr, and I am compelled to waste the night as her *escudero*, when so many delightful girls are present."

"The flower of Madrid and Aranjuez."

"I will revenge myself on Campbell for this trick of his."

"Try if Blacier, of the 60th, will relieve you of her. Germans are not very fastidious in their tastes. He is standing among the dancers, alike regardless of place or persons, smoking his long German pipe as coolly as he would do in a guard-room."

Alister led the unconscious lady off, and succeeded "in turning her over to Blacier's command," as he said when he rejoined Ronald.

"There is Seaton," said he, "striving to make himself agreeable to the gay widow of the Calle Mayor, Donna Elvira Moro."

"Seaton can easily do that; he is a very handsome fellow. Who is the young lady to whom Bevan has attached himself so closely?"

"One of rank, I believe, and a widow too,—the Condessa Estremera."

"How gaily she flirts."

"Poor Bevan! he is a simple fellow, and I believe she is making a sad fool of him. Last night I saw her amusing herself thus with one of the 34th, and—— Hah! here comes Lisle, with the duke and the young ladies. Beautiful girls!"

"Beautiful indeed!" echoed Stuart, as the tall and portly duke, attired in an old-fashioned dress, with his broad beaver under his left arm, and, encased in a white glove, the little hand of Donna Olivia drooping on his right, entered the dancing-rooms, followed by Lisle leading Donna Virginia. Both the sisters were tall, and of queen-like figures. Their dresses of white satin were richly trimmed with fine lace, and lofty ostrich feathers nodded above their glossy ringlets, amid which many a diamond and other gem sparkled and blazed when they moved. Long white Spanish veils, descending from the head, hung down behind them, giving to their figures still greater grace and dignity.

"They are lovely creatures!" said Macdonald. "But Virginia moves like an empress among all the plumed and jewelled beauties around her."

"What a thrice enviable sub is Master Louis, to be their cavalier! All eyes are turned upon them."

"And a knight of Alcantara, yonder, leaning against the mantel-piece, seems to eye Lisle with a very unfriendly look. In truth, Donna Olivia appears like some being of another world. Her features are Grecian rather than Spanish; and her eyes—by Jove! they are brighter than diamonds, and flash like lightning when she smiles."

"You seem quite enraptured with her."

"I am a connoisseur; but fair as she is, there is one bonnie lass in the Western Isles, who to me seems fairer still. Olivia is a bold and beautiful girl, but there is something softer, yet not less pleasing, in the hazel eyes of Virginia."

"Virginia! By heavens, I should know her face! Where can I have seen it before?"

"Hush! they are moving this way, smiling and coquetting as if they meant to be the death of us all."

"Faith! Alister, I hope Lisle will have the charity to introduce us."

"Tush! A Spanish officer has carried off Olivia. He has engaged her for the next dance. He is bowing to you, Stuart."

Ronald's eyes at that moment encountered those of the Condé de Truxillo. Both bowed, and the condé, placing his arm around Olivia, wheeled her into the circle of the waltzers, where they were seen only for a moment now and then. Fassifern led away the duke to one of the refreshment-tables in the garden; while Lisle, followed by the sharp eyes of many a jealous cavalier, advanced towards Stuart and Macdonald, with Virginia leaning on his arm.

"I wish one of you would find a partner," said he; "we want a *vis-à-vis* for the next quadrille."

"With pleasure."

"I am engaged to dance with Donna Isabel de Campo," said Alister; "but pray introduce me, Louis."

"And me," added Ronald. "A most lucky dog you are!" These

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observations passed in English; but the formal introduction was gone through in choice Castilian. "I have surely had the happiness of seeing Donna Virginia before," said Ronald. "It is impossible I could ever forget."

"Holy Mother! *Senor Officiale*," exclaimed the young lady with an air of pretty surprise, as she raised her fine eyebrows; "is it possible that you recognize me, arrayed as I now am in a garb so different from that which I wore in the convent of Santa Cruz?"

"Do I behold the Madre Santa Martha of Jarciejo in Donna Virginia? What riddle is this, senora?"

"A strange one truly, senor, and a very agreeable transformation," replied the lady, blushing and smiling as she glanced at her figure, which was fully reflected in an opposite mirror.

"What is all this?" asked Lisle in surprise. "Then you are acquainted with each other, it seems?"

"O yes, Don Louis; quite old friends indeed," replied the lady, with a vivacity which piqued Don Louis a little. "We met on a sad occasion—a very sad one, truly,—of which I will give you the history when we are at leisure. 'Tis quite a romance, and Cervantes of Esquivas,* or Juan de Valencia,† have never written anything like it."

"Allow me to lead you, Donna Virginia; the dancers are arranging themselves. Had we not better take our places?"

"Certainly, senor; but our *vis-à-vis*, remember. Shall I introduce your friend to the Condessa Estremera,—she waltzes beautifully."

"The Condessa is engaged; she appears resolved to make quite a conquest of Bevan of ours."

"Are we to look all night for a *vis-à-vis?* Oh! here comes my sister Olivia; she is beautiful enough to make him die of love, and I shall introduce him, if it was only to make Truxillo jealous."

Truxillo regarded Stuart with no pleasant eye as he carried off his donna. However, he endeavoured to dissemble, and said with a smile, "I congratulate you, senor, on obtaining the highest order of knighthood that a Spanish king can confer. You will find it *easy* work to protect the pilgrims who visit Compostella from the insults of the Moors in the nineteenth century. I am myself a commander of the order," he added, displaying a richer cross, around which was the motto,—*Sanguine Arabum.*

"I am again to be the rival of this fiery condé. I am always in some confounded scrape," thought Ronald, as he led his partner to her place.

"*Santa Anna*, senor! these rooms are suffocating," said the lady.

"As soon as the dance is ended, permit me to have the honour of leading you to the garden."

"Pray relieve me of my scarf." The thin gauze screen was transferred from the white shoulders of Olivia to Ronald's arm.

"See, senor,—the Condessa; how well she is looking. Ah! had she only worn her tiara on her black curls, she would have been matchless."

"Impossible, while Donna Olivia is present."

"Look at that officer of Villamur's regiment,—a handsome cavalier; he bows. How do you do, Pedro? What can that old knight of Calatrava be whispering to the rich widow of the Calle Mayor? Ah, I would give the world to know! How they smile at each other. Love must be very agreeable. *Santos!* I have dropped my fan. Quick, senor; pick it up,

* Cervantes is said to have been born at Esquivas, near Toledo.

† Author of *El Patranuelo*, and other old-fashioned works.

before the feet of the dancers—— A thousand thanks," she added, as Ronald restored it to her. "I would not have it destroyed for the universe,—'tis a present from Don Carlos Avallo: he, too, is looking this way. How d'ye do, Carlos?" and thus did Olivia run on during all the intervals between the figures of the dance.

No sooner was the quadrille over, than the gallopade was proposed.

"*Viva la gallopade!* cavaliers," crid Cameron, striking his hands together. Lisle still kept Virginia, and Ronald her gay sister, and all the cavaliers of Old and New Castile grew hot with indignation and jealousy. Away flew the dancers to the crash of music from the orchestra. The scene was indeed glorious. A hundred couples went round hand in hand, plumes waving, ear-rings trembling, jewels and epaulets, stars and medals flashing and glittering, spurs and poniards clanking, the light feet and muslin drapery of the graceful Spanish girls flying about and mingling with the buckled shoes and dark green tartans of the Highlanders. Bravo! It was beautiful.

The dance was over, and the ladies, breathless and overcome, with bosoms panting, cheeks blushing, and eyes sparkling, clung to the arms of their cavaliers, who led them through the open casements to promenade in the cool gardens, where the female waiters, little sylph-like girls about twelve or fifteen years old, clad in white, with their black curls streaming about, glided through the illuminated arbours and walks, handing ices to the ladies, and cool and sparkling champagne or Malaga to the gentlemen. When promenading with Olivia through one of the beautiful walks, from each side of which he was constantly culling fresh flowers for her bouquet, Ronald heard familiar voices conversing in an orange-bower, the interior of which was brilliantly illuminated with parti-coloured lamps.

"Yes, sir; we turned their flank, and fell upon them with the bayonet, and with God's help cut to pieces every mother's son of them in five minutes," said Campbell, within the bower, striking his heavy hand emphatically on the seat; adding afterwards, in another tone, "Most excellent champagne this, Don Ascasibur, and much obliged we are to the ex-king of Spain for leaving it here to be drunk by better men."

"*Satanas* take the ex-king!" replied Ynürritegui. "And so it was as you tell, that this very noble old cavalier was slain?"

"Ay, sir; the shot struck him *here*, and he fell sword in hand from his saddle. A gallant fellow was Sir Ralph, and under his command I was initiated into all the sublime mysteries of soldiery."

"Campbell has been fighting Egypt over again to my *patron*," thought Stuart. "Major," said he, looking in, "how can you and Don Ascasibur be so ungallant as to forsake the ladies for champagne flasks? Fie upon you! senores."

"The ladies will not break their hearts: such a fright old Ynürritegui is!" whispered Olivia, behind her fan.

"Campbell, do you mean to sit here all night?" said Chisholm, looking in on the other side, as he passed with a lady. "They are arranging themselves for the *galope* again."

"It is fit only for subs," replied the major, testily. "The idea of a field-officer galloping any way but on horseback!"

"It seems quite the rage here at Aranjuez," said Stuart, as Chisholm moved off. "But then the girls here galope so beautifully, they are in the right to have it so. So, major, you do not mean to join the dancers to-night?"

"Yes," answered the other, shaking the flasks, which all proved empty; "but neither at waltz, quadrille, or galope. I have no idea of flying round a room at the rate of ten miles an hour, in mortal terror the while of

crushing the ladies' dear little feet and white satin shoes with my heavy brogues. Besides, the dance is too intricate for me—'chassez to the right and left, turn your partner, balancez, turn again, galopade à la chassez to places!' Pooh! I would rather dance Tullochgorm, or the *Ruighle Thulaichean*, or any other decent fling; but I have no love for your Spanish dances and galopade quadrilles. They ill become the *sporran* and *breacan-an-feile* of the Highlandman, and are no more to be compared to a strathspey than a Toledo is to a real fluted Andrea Ferrara." The major snapt his fingers, and chanted with a loud voice a verse of the Grant's reel:

"There needs na be sae great a phrase,
Wi' dringing dull Italian lays,
I wadna gie our ain strathspeys
For half a hundred score o' em.

They're douff an' dowie at the best,
Douff and dowie, douff and dowie.
They're douff an' dowie at the best,
Wi' a' their variorum.

They're douff and dowie at the best,
Their allegros and a' the rest,
They canna please a Highland taste,
Compared wi' Tullochgorm."

Stuart was leading away Donna Olivia, who laughed excessively at the major's song, which sounded wondrously uncouth to her ears, when Campbell called to him. "I say, Stuart," said he, "I am going to show the ladies here a new fling. I have sent for Ranald Dhu and the six pipers. Fassifern, Ronald Macdonuil, and myself, are about to perform the sword dance. We astonished old Mohammed Djedda with it in Egypt. You must join us."

"I should be most happy, but I am the honoured cavalier of one of the prettiest girls in Aranjuez, and it is impossible I can join you; but we will witness it in the hall."

A few minutes afterwards the pipers arrived, and preparations were made for the Highland dance. Claymores were taken from the wall, and laid across each other on the floor. The colonel, Campbell, and two other officers took their places, while seven pipers stood at the end of the hall, and on a given signal struck up an appropriate air.

"*Santa Maria!*" screamed the senoras, and "*Morte de Dios!*" growled the senores, while they covered their ears with their hands to protect them from "so dangerous an invasion." Many an English and Irish officer did so likewise, for the sound of the pipes in the vaulted hall was tremendous. Away went the dancers to the sound of the first note, and continued to leap, skip, and "hooch and hoo!" while they flung about with true Scottish spirit and agility, moving with miraculous precision among the bare blades of the claymores, while applauses loud and long rewarded them. 'Twas a new sight indeed to the Spaniards, and the eyes of every Scotsman present lighted up with enthusiasm, although many of them had never witnessed the martial dance before. Long after the others had resumed their seats, the gigantic Campbell, strong, active, and filled with perfect delight, continued to dance, wave his arms and the folds of his enormous kilt and plaid, until at last compelled to sink into a seat, amid loud huzzas and astounding *vivas*.

Quadrilles, galopades, and waltzes again followed, and before the ball broke up, the light of the morning sun had replaced the illuminations of the palace and its gardens. Then came the gallant farewells, and shawls, mantillas, and furred shoes were in requisition, the gentlemen making themselves as busy as possible in wrapping up the ladies to protect them from the chill morning air; and then, muffling themselves in their cloaks,

many an officer and cavalier strode away behind the lumbering carriage or sedan, which conveyed to her home some lady to whom they had been particularly attentive during the night, and whom, as in duty bound, they wished to squire to the door of her own residence,—the streets of continental cities not being very safe at these hours, when *picaros* and *valiantes** of every kind are on the watch, to exercise their talents on the unsuspecting or unprotected.

On the following evening a grand bull-fight was to be held in the marble square, for the entertainment of the British. The splendid mansion of the Duke of Alba de T—— formed nearly a whole side of this elegant Plaza, and from its windows an excellent view could be obtained. The Condé de Truxillo, Fassifera, Seaton, Lisle, and Stuart, and many other officers, dined with the duke that day. The ladies were all smiles and beauty, although a little pale with the fatigues of the preceding evening; but Olivia, and her cousin the bright-eyed condessa, were as gay and vivacious as ever. The dinner, which consisted of a variety of stews, cutlets, and light confectionary, began by a course of fruit, just as ours ends. Afterwards came chocolate, and cigars for those gentlemen who chose to lounge on the balconies, and plenty of flirting, waltzing, singing, and music at the piano and guitar, for those who remained with the ladies.

During the whole day preparations had been making for the approaching display. All the streets leading to the Plaza were strongly barricadoed with bullock-cars, mule-carts, and everything that could serve to enclose the arena, and prevent the escape of the bulls.

Four of them were imprisoned in a den at one end of the square, where they were undergoing a process of torture, being goaded by steel pikes through holes in the roof, to rouse them to the requisite pitch of madness and ferocity. It was a beautiful sunny evening, and about four o'clock the people began to collect; at six the Plaza was crowded to excess,—the balconies, roofs, and windows were all taken possession of, and hundreds of pennons, streamers, and garlands flaunted from the houses; while the bands of the 28th and the 6th Portuguese caçadores filled the air with strains of music, and delight shone in every Spanish eye at the amusement promised by their favourite national pastime.

The guests of the duke occupied the large balcony, which extended along the front of his house. It was covered with a piece of tapestry, and the ladies were seated in front, while their cavaliers stood behind. Here Stuart missed the condé, who had been by Donna Olivia's side all day. He was about to inquire for him, when Balthazzar suddenly appeared in the arena, arrayed in a very singular garb. A small velvet cap was on his head, fully displaying his short curly hair and fine features. He wore a close-fitting doublet of black cloth slashed with white; a mantle of a bright orange-colour hung on his left arm, and in his right hand he carried a short pike about five feet long, the head of which was of sharp and bright steel. Three other cavaliers, similarly accoutred, made their appearance in the arena, and the people raised a cry of "*Viva Baltazar, el valiente soldado! Viva el gracios caballero Asocaibar Ynürriteguí!* Here are the bulls! Here are the bulls!"

Balthazzar kissed his hand to Donna Olivia, who threw him a flower from her breast, and he placed it in his cap.

"Beware, my poor condé," said she, "and be not over rash. Remember that your foes are bulls from the Xamara."

"Are they different from any other bulls, Donna Virginia," asked Louis.

"Oh! have you not heard? They are the very fiercest in Spain,—

* Rogues and ruffians, or bravos.

perhaps in the world. When once aroused, nothing tames them but being slain."

"And to these the condé is about to oppose himself. Are you not concerned for his safety, senoras?"

"Balthazzar has a sharp pike and a sure heel," answered Olivia, fanning herself, "and I have no fears for him."

"Have you ever seen any one killed in the arena?"

"Yes. A bull of Xamara tossed our poor cousin, the Condé Estremera, into the air, and he came down dead."

"And still you like this sport?" said Cameron, "sport which our Scottish ladies would shudder to look upon."

"Yes, senor. *O viva Santissima!*" answered all the ladies at once, clapping their white hands, "here come the bulls!"

A shout of delight from the multitude shook the Plaza. A sort of portcullis had been raised, and forth from his den rushed a bull into the arena, his eyes darting fire, with nostrils elated, and mouth covered with foam, the hair of his neck bristling up like the mane of a lion, and every muscle quivering with the torture he had undergone. He rolled his red eyes about, as if to select a convenient object to attack. The condé waved his orange mantle across the face of the bull, which, uttering a roar, plunged forward upon him. Closely pursued by his formidable adversary, Truxillo ran round the arena. This was the most dangerous part of the game, as a fall, or the least false step, would be certain death. At the moment when the bull was preparing for a grand plunge "with hoof and horn," the condé sprung over a barrier, dropping his mantle as he did so. It was instantly transfixed and tossed into the air by the bull, which was now attacked in the rear by Don Ascasibur, who carried a red mantle and a pike, which he plunged into the brawny flank of the victim. With a roar of fury and agony, the beast thundered over the marble pavement after his assailant, but was diverted from the pursuit, being pierced by the pikes of a third and fourth cavalier, who kept him galloping round the arena in every direction, dropping their mantles and leaping the barriers whenever the danger became too pressing, until he sunk exhausted and bloody at the base of the statue of Charles the Fifth, where the condé put an end to its agony by plunging his pike repeatedly into its body. Three others were slain in the same manner, and all the performers had narrow escapes for their lives at different times. The four bulls were sent away to the kitchen of the *Casa de los Locos*,* for the benefit of the patients and the poor people of the town. Extraordinary agility, skill, and courage were displayed by the four cavaliers in this daring Spanish game, which, though not less cruel, had in it, by the personal risk incurred, something infinitely nobler and more chivalric than the brutal custom of bull-baiting, which so long disgraced South Britain.

In the course of an hour all the bulls had fallen in succession, and yielded the palm to their four tormentors, who were greeted with enthusiastic applause by the multitude, on whose shoulders they were lifted up, and carried by force triumphantly round the square.

When this display was over, the condé resumed the brown uniform and silver epaulets of the 4th Spanish infantry, and rejoined the duke's guests in the balcony, from which they were beholding other feats of dexterity. A tall and powerful Spaniard, Gaspar Alozegui, the strongest and most athletic man in the two Castiles, entered the arena, bearing a large cannon-shot and a sledge-hammer. He waved his broad hat to the populace, who cheered their favourite, as no man yet had ever rivalled him in feats of strength and agility. Taking up the cannon-shot, the weight of which

* Asylum for the insane.

I have forgotten, he poised it for a moment in his hand, and then tossing it from him, sent it whizzing along the pavement, as a bowler does a cricket-ball, from one end of the Plaza to the other, where it rebounded against the wall of a house, and lay still. Alozegui arrogantly challenged any man among the thousands there assembled to throw it within ten feet of the spot where it then lay, offering in that case to forfeit a purse of ten *onzas*, presented to the victor by the fair *patronas* of the day—the daughters of the Duke of Alba de T——. Alozegui looked around him triumphantly; but no man answered the challenge, which was not delivered in very moderate language, and he now grasped the shaft of his ponderous hammer. Swinging it thrice round his head, he hurled it from his hand with the speed of a thunderbolt. The crowd for a moment held their breath, and the gaze of their eyes followed the semicircle which it described through the air. It alighted close by the shot, and again the cheers of the people broke forth; after which Gaspar repeated his challenge, in the same arrogant terms.

"Such an insolent dog as this Alozegui deserves to be beaten," said the condé.

"He has thrown well," observed Stuart, as he leant over the balcony; "yet the sport loses its zest when there is no competitor."

"*Viva*, Alozegui," said Donna Olivia. "He deserves to kiss my hand, and should but for his bushy black beard."

"I am convinced that my servant, Dugald Mohr, old as he is, will throw these matters further," said Fassifern, who was indignant at Alozegui's challenge, and burned with eagerness to see him beaten. He spoke in English—"I suppose Dugald is below among the servants. He followed me here. As sure as my name is John Cameron, he will beat Alozegui."

"Let some one inquire if he is below."

"I say, colonel," cried Seaton, who was seated at the other end of the balcony, with his glass at his eye; "surely, Campbell of ours is about to answer the challenge of the Spaniard. He has entered the arena."

"Now, by heavens! well done Colin, and Dugald Mhor, too,—honest old Dugald! Look to yourself, Micer Alozegui; you will scarcely hold the prize against two such men," said Cameron, in great glee. "Major, are you about to contend with this impudent loon?"

"We are, indeed," replied Campbell, "and hard work the braggadocio will have to beat us. Dugald and I are comrades to-day, and mean to show these dons the mettle of Highlandmen, and what sort of muscle brose and brochan can produce. I have hurled a stone three times the size of that shot from Craigfianteach into Lochawe, and mean to strain every nerve to give the dons a surprise. I thought it a shame that so many British men should stand by quietly, and let a Spaniard boast thus. Throwing the hammer is a national amusement, and I hope that neither don nor devil will beat a Scotsman at it. After we have conquered Senor Alozegui, Dugald and I will challenge the whole crowd to a game at quoits or shinty, whichever they like best."

Alozegui, on understanding that they had answered the challenges, laid the shot and hammer before them, carefully marking the places where they lay: a needless precaution, as he very soon learned.

"Dugald Cameron, my man, take you the shot," said the major, "and let them see that you are 'steel to the bane.' Ye showed true mettle the day Alexandria was fought, and can do so here, lyart though your pow may be. I will take the fore-hammer; and now, my lads! here are two decent Highlandmen, against all the bearded braggarts on this side of the Pyrenees."

"I am auld enough to be his gutcher twice ower and mair, as my siller haffets and rankled cheeks may tell you; but I will never shrink frae the task when a Hieland gentleman like your honour commands me," said Dugald, as he cast down his bonnet, sword, and plaid; and taking up the ball as if it had been a walnut, without once looking at it, threw it over the houses at the end of the square, by a single swing of his arm.

"The Cameron for ever! Well done, Dugald!" exclaimed the major. "A foot lower, and the Emperor had lost his head, which would have spoiled all the sport."

Dugald laughed, stroked down his white hairs, and casting his plaid around him, withdrew under the balcony where the delighted Fassifern was standing. He received a cheer, though not a very cordial one, from the people; and Alozegui bestowed upon him a most formidable scowl of rage and hatred, to which he replied by a laugh, and a direction to "gie the gowd he had tint to the puirfolk." Now came the major's turn, and the Spaniard began to tremble for his fame. The former, after examining the ponderous hammer, to assure himself that the handle was firmly fixed into it, swung it once around his head, and straining every muscle to conquer, cast it from his hand with a force and swiftness truly amazing. Describing a complete arch over the spacious Plaza, it whirled through the air, and passing over the houses of an adjacent street, lighted among the reeds on the banks of the Tagus, where it was discovered next day. However, it could not be found for that night; and the only reward Campbell received from the Spaniards for his prowess, was the half-muttered ejaculation of astonishment at the flight taken by the missile. The dons were very angry at their hero being beaten by a foreigner and heretic, and so astonished at his wonderful strength, that they readily adopted the opinion of some old Capuchine padres, "that he had been assisted by the devil."

"Hoich, major! weel dune," shouted old Dugald, waving his bonnet. "Fair play a' the warld ower,—*Cothram na feine*,* as we say at hame in Lochiel. Ferntosh and barley-bannock are the stuff to mak' men o'; no accadenty and snail-broth,—deevil tak' them baith!"

"Long life to you, major," cried many of the Highlanders; and hundreds of soldiers belonging to the 66th, 34th, and other corps of the division, huzzaed him loudly. On receiving from the duke's *contador* (steward) the purse of thirty *onzas*, Campbell, knowing that Dugald was too proud to touch a maravedi of the money, placed it in the hands of Alozegui, telling him not to be cast down, as Dugald and himself had beaten better men than ever trod the realm of Spain. This taunt only stung more deeply the fiery and enraged Spaniard, who scorned to receive the purse, which he tossed among the people, and leaping over the barriers, disappeared. Campbell waved his hummel-bonnet (a plain cap without feathers) to the assembled multitude, and withdrew to finish the night over a pigskin with Don Ascasibur, and tell endless narratives about Egypt and Sir Ralph.

During that evening, from a thousand little circumstances which it is needless to rehearse, it was evident to Ronald that Louis Lisle was deeply enamoured of the beautiful Virginia; and that she was not unfavourable to him was also manifest, although she took every means to conceal it: but Ronald had a sharp eye for these matters. What the opinion of the proud old duke might be on such a subject it was not difficult to say; and his conscience would not in the least have prevented him from employing the poniard of some matador to rid his family of such a suitor. However, his mind was at that moment too much taken up with political schemes to permit him to observe the growing passion between his daughter and the

* The equal battle of the Fingalians,—a Highland proverb.

young Scottish subaltern, to whom twenty days' residence in his palace had given every opportunity to press his suit that a lover could desire.

The party at the De T—— palace broke up about eleven o'clock, and ruminating on the probabilities of Louis's winning the donna, should he really propose for her hand, Ronald passed slowly through the marble square, and down a street leading towards his billet, which was near the Calle Mayor. A gush of light, streaming into the darkness through the open portal and traceried windows of an illuminated chapel, invited him to enter, in expectation of beholding some solemn religious ceremony; but the building was entirely empty, and the blaze of light proceeded from some hundreds of tapers burning around the gilded shrine of the patron saint of Aranjuez. From this spot a strong flood of crimson light glared through the nave and chancel, tinging with the hue of blood the black marble pavement, the slender pillars, and the groined roof of fretted stonework. Many mouldy portraits of saints adorned the walls; around the lighted shrine were hung certain strange memorials, placed there by the piety of those whom the saint was supposed to have cured. Crutches, even wooden legs, and many stucco casts of deformed limbs, were there displayed, all doubtless the work of cunning priests, to impose upon the credulity of the Spaniards. But what chiefly raised his wonder, was some hundred little images of children, with which the place was absolutely crowded.

His attention was next attracted by several standards, the trophies of war, which hung from the highest part of the chapel, where the roof rose somewhat in the form of a dome. These belonged to various nations; and one, by the crescents on it, he judged to be Moorish; but the other two he remarked more particularly. The one was the ensign of a British ship of war which had been wrecked on the coast of Spain; the other was an ancient Scottish standard of white silk, crossed with St. Andrew's blue cross, and splendidly embroidered with silver thistles. About the latter he could not obtain the least information, although he made every inquiry next day. But it was probably the regimental colour of some of the Scottish auxiliaries who served in the Low Countries against the Emperor Charles the Fifth. Ronald was revolving in his own mind the means of capturing or destroying both these standards, when the entrance of the Condé de Truxillo diverted him from his purpose, and saved to the Spaniards those trophies which most likely still adorn the chapel royal of Aranjuez.

"What adventure are you in search of now, senor, that you have not yet sought your billet in the Calle Mayor?"

"I understand," replied the condé, "that the Carbineros of Medina del Campo marched into Aranjuez about sunset. I have a very dear brother, an officer in them, and I am searching for some one to direct me to his quarters, late as the hour is. Manuel and I were very dear friends in youth, being educated together at our old castle near Truxillo; but we have not seen each other for six years, as our regiments have always campaigned in different provinces. He was a slender youth, without a hair on his lip when I saw him last, but now he must be a stout and well-whiskered cavalier. Ah, how much I long to behold him!"

"I regret, condé, that I can give you no information as to where the quarters of the Carbineros are. Some of the quarter-guards may perhaps inform you."

"Ho! senor Stuart," exclaimed Truxillo, as his eye fell on the shrine with all its little images and blazing tapers. "Lo, you now! behold what rogues our padres are. Do you know the meaning of all these images?"

"No. I own I was somewhat puzzled to discover."

"Well, senor," answered Truxillo with a loud laugh, "all these are the images of children born unto ladies who had long pined for them before they had visited this miraculous shrine,—so the monks tell us."

"Strange, if true."

"Its reputed sanctity is truly amazing; and all the dames of old and new Castile, Leon, and Arragon consider a visit to this place a sovereign remedy. They are shown the tomb of the saint in the vaults below; and its influence, aided by the attentions of a few stout padres, certainly has brought about singular cures; and —— But here comes my servant; he has been searching for the quarters of the Carbineros, and will —— Hah!" exclaimed Truxillo, his countenance changing as a servant belonging to the De T—— family entered the chapel, "do you seek me?"

The servant, who wore the orange-coloured livery of the duke, replied by whispering something into the ear of Don Balthazzar, whose "brow grew black as thunder."

"*Falsificador!* madman! what is this you have dared to tell me?" he exclaimed, furiously grasping the menial by the throat.

"The solemn truth, most noble condé. Release me! San Juan in the wilderness could not speak more truly. I am faithful to you,—I am, by the Virgin!—Oh—" It is probable the fellow would never have spoken again, had not Ronald released his neck from the clutch of the condé.

"Cavalier!" exclaimed the latter, seizing Ronald's hand, "I know you to be brave and honourable as man can be. I have been basely betrayed this night. Will you follow me, that I may recover my lost honour, or perish? A deadly insult has been offered to me."

"I pledge you my word I will, Balthazzar. But what has this trembling blockhead told you?"

"*Satanas!* that Donna Olivia, to whom not an hour ago I plighted my love and troth, has even now a cavalier in her chamber."

"Impossible; he lies!"

"He does not—I know that he does not. I have bribed him to watch his mistress, and have long found him faithful. But Olivia, false and base Olivia! I have long suspected her falsehood and coquetry, and this night I will fearfully revenge them both upon herself. It must be Carlos Avallo. Malediction! I will slay him before her face. By our Lady of the Rock! my most sacred oath, I swear it!"

Balthazzar rushed away from the chapel, and Stuart followed to prevent him, if possible, from committing any outrage, and pursued him through the dark streets at his utmost speed. In a few seconds they stood before the mansion they had quitted but a short time ago. It was completely involved in darkness, save one room, from the windows of which a light straggled through the white curtains upon the balcony from which they had witnessed the bull-fight.

"The sisters sleep in separate apartments; that is Olivia's," whispered Truxillo, in a voice husky with the passions which possessed his heart. "Did you not see a tall shadow pass the window?"

"Let me entreat you, noble condé, to stay—to hold but for a single moment!"

"*Carajo!* may it be my last if I do!" replied the other fiercely, as he grasped a carved stone ornament projecting from the wall, and swung himself into the balcony, where he drew his sword, and applied his eye to the opening of the window curtains. Apprehensive that he might commit some rash deed, Ronald followed him, but with infinite trouble, rage having enabled the condé to climb by means which the other could not find. He was not without some secret fears that this rival cavalier might be Louis Lisle, and grasping Truxillo by the arm, he detained

him by main force; and had the parties within been less occupied with themselves than they were, they must undoubtedly have heard the half-muttered threats of Balthazzar, and the scuffling which ensued on the balcony.

Through the half-opened casement they surveyed the chamber and its occupants. The sleeping-place of the donna was certainly a splendid one; the hangings, the chairs, the bed, and covering of the *estrado*, raised at one end of the floor, were all of white or rose-coloured velvet, fringed and embroidered with gold, and everything else was of corresponding richness. A lamp, the globe of which was of rose-coloured glass, shed a warm light through the apartment; and three large vases of fresh flowers, placed on the verge of the *estrado*, gave forth an agreeable perfume. In a splendid easy-chair, which glittered with gilding and gilt nails, the beautiful Olivia was seated near her toilet table,—the looseness of her dress and the disorder of her ringlets showing that she had been preparing for repose before her visitor had entered by the window, a place of ingress used oftener than the door by Spanish lovers. An officer in a Spanish cavalry uniform was kneeling at her feet, and his cloak and helmet lay on the floor near him.

"Lo! holy Virgin, a pretty piece of daring," said the lady as they approached the window.

"Pardon me, beautiful one," said the officer; "and remember, that if I had not visited you thus, I might never have seen you at all."

"And what then, senor?"

"Cruel Olivia! can you trifle with a passion so earnest as mine?"

"A pretty fellow, to visit me like a bravo by the window, with a sword in your hand. This will teach me to bolt my shutters more securely. Come now, senor, I have heard quite enough of this: you must retire. *O santos!* should you be seen!"

"Heartless Olivia! and you bid me leave you thus?"

"Heartless? You are mighty gallant, *mi amigo!*"

"Remember that we march to-morrow, and I may never see you again."

"Well, I suppose I shall not want for a husband. The Condé of Truxillo, Pedro de Esquivias, or Carlos Avallo will, any of them, be glad to have me when I choose. O 'tis a gay thing to be loved by many cavaliers! But leave me, I entreat—no, command you!" said the lady, curling up her black tresses with her white slender fingers.

"Grant me but a single kiss, Olivia, and I will retire never to trouble you again. I will seek death in our first encounter with the enemy."

"You love yourself too well for that."

"Grant me but one salute, and I leave you. Oh, after all the misery of my long year's absence, do not refuse me that!"

"Take it, thou false *picaro*, and be gone," replied the coquettish girl, pouting her cherry mouth, towards which the cavalier advanced his well-moustached lip.

"Perish first!" exclaimed the enraged Truxillo, rushing forward and driving his sword through the back and breast of the unfortunate lover. "Die in your audacity, whoever you are, you false interloper! Die, villain!" he added, repeating the stab; and the cavalier died without a groan. "Farewell for ever, false Olivia," cried the savage condé; "and remember that my love, unworthy as you are of it, alone protects you from the effects of my fury and disappointment!" He was about to leave the place, when his eye fell upon the countenance of the cavalier he had so ruthlessly and rashly slain. He was now lying stark and dead, the blood from his wounds streaming over the oaken floor of the room. Truxillo groaned deeply, and

striking his forehead, staggered back, dropping his sword, while his countenance became pale and livid.

"*El Espiritu Santo santissimo! O Dios mio!*" he cried in a husky voice, the tone of which was heart-piercing and horrible, "I have slain my brother,—my brave brother! *O Manuel el Carbinero*,—is it you I have murdered? Ten thousand maledictions blast you, false woman! blast you, and follow you to all eternity! 'Tis you have wrought me this deadly sin!" and rushing into the balcony he sprung into the street, leaving Ronald in the apartment of the lady, standing irresolute and stupified with amazement at the suddenness of this catastrophe, which came to pass in less time than I have taken to record it. Olivia, whose voice had at first failed her in the extremity of her terror, now shrieked long and loudly to arouse the household, which she did so effectually, that in three minutes they were all mustered in her chamber, armed with all sorts of weapons, and among others Lisle with his drawn sword. Great indeed was their astonishment to see Ronald in the sleeping-room of Donna Olivia at midnight, and an officer lying dead on the floor, weltering in a pool of blood. All clamorously demanded an explanation of this singular scene, and the indignation of the old duke it is impossible to describe, such room was there for scandal in the story of a cavalier being slain at night in the bed-room of his daughter. *Diavolo!* thought he, all Spain, from Cape Ortegal to Gibraltar, will be ringing with the tale! Some of the females attempted to recover the lady, who had sunk on her bed in a swoon; while the others required Ronald, in shrill tones of anger and surprise, to give a detail of the matter. This he hesitated to do, not wishing to criminate the condé, and still less wishing to be taken for the culprit himself.

In this dilemma the bustle and commotion were increased by the arrival of a pompous old alcalde, who dwelt opposite, and Senor Rubio, the notary, with six alguazils, who were for arresting Ronald on the instant; but, laying his hand on the hilt of his dirk, he vowed to run through the heart the first who laid a finger upon him; upon which the limbs of the law, recoiling, began to handle the locks of their heavy *trabucos*, and more blood would probably have been shed, had not the alcalde interfered.

This magistrate, whose person and authority the duke had always treated with contempt, was very glad to have opportunity of affronting him; and assuming as much consequence as he could, he administered an oath to Ronald in the Spanish manner, by swearing him across his sword and dirk, and then desiring him to relate what he knew of this matter,—and word for word his relation was committed to writing by the keen-eyed and sharp-visaged little notary. Englishmen might have doubted the relation; but in Spain the words of an honourable cavalier are not to be questioned, and the account proving satisfactory to the alcalde, in so far as concerned Ronald Stuart, he was permitted to retire; while Senor Rubio, and the six men with blunderbusses, were sent off in pursuit of the condé, whom they discovered on his knees before the very shrine he had made the subject of his jests an hour before. Three days afterwards he was tried by a general court-martial, composed of Spanish officers,—the General de Costa being president. Every man supposed his death to be certain; but he was, strange to say, acquitted. Yet life was no boon to poor Truxillo, who, being continually haunted by the miserable death of his brother, became reckless of existence, and by throwing himself madly in the way of danger, endeavoured to perish in expiation of the crime he had committed in the blindness of his rage and jealousy.

This occurrence appeared for the present to be a death-blow to the hopes of Louis Lisle. On the following day the duke quitted Aranjeus with his family, retiring suddenly no one knew whither. He was so much

enraged against Olivia, who indeed was not to blame, that he threatened to disgrace her for ever, by incarcerating her in the *Monasterio de los Arrepentidás** of Seville, but the tears and entreaties of Donna Virginia made him change his intention: the sisters were separated, and for ever. Olivia was sent off to Galicia, and confined in a solitary convent among the wild ridges of the Sierra de Mondonedo, where, if living, she probably still resides.

CHAPTER III.

THE SKIRMISH OF FUENTE DUENNA.—THE LEAGUER OF ALBA DE TORMES.

About the middle of October the legions of Marshals Jourdan and Soult, having formed a junction, advanced, under the command of the latter, fifty thousand strong, from Valencia on Madrid, and in a short time arrived within a few leagues of Aranjuez. Combining his forces with those of Generals Elio and Freire, and with the Spaniards of Don Carlos de Espagna, Sir Rowland Hill, at the head of forty thousand well-tried soldiers, moved to meet them, commencing his march from Aranjuez on the 23rd of October. Many a sorrowful farewell was said that morning, and many a bright eye grew dim as the retiring sound of the British drums died away among the windings of the Tagus. Crossing the latter, immediately below the walls of the palace, the division marched to Colmenare de Orijo, a town of Toledo. Here different brigades were posted at the several fords of the Tagus, by which Soult's infantry might attempt to pass. That at Fuente Duenna fell to the lot of the first brigade. On the second day after their bivouacking there, a party of the enemy's cavalry were seen approaching the river, either to cross or reconnoitre. The light company of the Gordon Highlanders, and Captain Blacier's company of the German rifles, were ordered to receive them at the ford. Unluckily for himself, Lisle accompanied "the light bobs" on this occasion as a volunteer, in place of an officer who was sick. Seaton commanded the whole, and he placed the companies in ambush among some laurel-bushes, willows, and long reeds which grew by the water-side, overlooking the place where the dragoons must cross if such was their intention. The Highlanders knelt down on the right knee, but the Germans, who were posted among the reeds, lay flat on the ground, and levelled their short rifles over the glazed tops of their shakoes, which they placed before them. All were ready to let fly a volley among the unsuspecting Frenchmen, who came forward at a gallop with their carbines unslung. The party consisted of nearly eighty heavy dragoons. An officer of cuirassiers and two others in staff uniform accompanied them. They drew their bridles at the brink of the river, and from his place of concealment Stuart recognised his friend De Mesmai in the cuirassier; and in one of the staff officers Monsieur Law, the Baron de Clappourkruis, in the other their late host at Aranjuez, the Duke of Alba de T——.

"Stuart," whispered Lisle, "is it possible, that the officer without the epaulets is really the duke?"

"Without doubt 'tis he."

"How base and treacherous!"

"He will receive the reward of his treason instantly. It has always been whispered that he was false to King Ferdinand and his allies. A base wretch! to join the invaders of Spain when so many brave men are

* A place of confinement for ladies who misbehave.

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struggling with heart and hand to free her from the grasp of the Buonapartes. Evan, bring that officer down. Mark him when the word is given to fire."

"Were he as fause as Menteith, an ounce o' cauld leed will settle him," replied Evan, blowing some loose powder from his lock. "Ill tak' him canny, and wing him aucht inches below the oxter,—that's just in the belt."

"No, no, for God's sake!" whispered Louis to Stuart. "He is the father of Virginia de Alba, and were he as false as Judas, that would save him."

"Hush!" whispered Seaton, in the same low tone; "they are conversing, and I should be glad to hear the news from Valencia."

"*Monsieur le Duc* will perhaps be so good as to inform us whereabouts this infernal bridge of Fuente Duenna lies?" said De Mesmai.

"Ah!" chimed in the baron, in Spanish, "this is the place marked by the marshal in his map."

"The bridge lies lower down the river," replied the duke; "but there is a ford in this neighbourhood, which I will have the honour to show you, senores."

"Do so, in the devil's name!" replied De Mesmai hastily, while he surveyed the duke with an expression on his dark face which showed how much he despised such an auxiliary, notwithstanding his rank. "We have ridden quite far enough to see this ford, and when you have shown it to the baron, I will condescend to thank you."

"De Mesmai!" said the baron, holding up his hand warningly.

"Bah! *Monsieur le Baron*,—I comprehend; the British may look for a visit in the morning, which will yield them more danger than delight. With your permission, Monsieur Law, after reconnoitring this ford we will retire as soon as possible, because I little like riding here in such open ground. These bushes opposite might contain a thousand riflemen, or some of your bare-legged brethren, than whom I would rather face the devil. I have provided a white stake to drive into the ground, which will mark the ford for Lamorciere's chasseurs, who lead the way in our attack on Hill's troops to-night."

"Colonel Lamorciere shall be welcome," said Seaton, as De Mesmai moved his horse along the bank of the river, chanting gaily an old rondeau beginning with,—

"Pauvres Anglais!
Vous n'avez que de l'arrogance,
Pauvres Anglais," &c. &c.

At that moment the Highland bugle-boy, who knelt by Seaton's side, sounded "*fire!*"

The bugle of the Germans answered on the left, and a deadly volley, which enveloped the whole place in smoke, was poured upon the French, nearly one half of whom fell from their saddles. Horses were seen galloping off in all directions, dragging their riders by the stirrup, or leaving them dead or dying on the ground. The traitor dashed his spurs into his horse's flanks and fled at full gallop, followed by the baron. But not so De Mesmai, whom this unexpected volley had filled with the utmost astonishment and ferocity, although it struck a temporary panic into the dragoons.

"Revenge! *mes camarades*. Follow me,—charge! By the name of the bomb! I will cleave to the gorget the first dastard who attempts to fly. *Vive l'Empereur!* Forward—charge!"

Animated by his example, they crossed the ford at a gallop, dashing the water right and left; and forcing their horses up to the bank, even while

exposed to a hot fire, they fell furiously with hoof and blade among the scattered Highlanders. It was a piece of unexampled daring for a few dragoons to cross a river thus, under a hot fire from concealed musketry.¶

"*Vive l'Empereur!* No quarter to the Germans!" shouted De Mesmai, leaping his horse over the underwood.

"Form square!" cried the deep and manly voice of Seaton. "Rally—rally! Quick, Highlanders, or you will be cut to pieces! Close to the centre, Germans and all; blow 'the assembly' bugler! Hurrah, my lads! Shoulder to shoulder, Highlandmen! and give them the bayonet." With the speed of thought a rallying square was formed. Blacier's Germans and the Highlanders mingled, the long cross-hilted daggers of the former acting efficiently as bayonets when fixed to the muzzles of their rifles. Ronald, while dressing, as it is technically termed, one of the faces of the square, narrowly escaped a cut aimed at him by a dragoon, who was instantly shot by Angus Mackie, a private next to him; and Seaton had the feathers of his bonnet shred away by a stroke from De Mesmai's sword. But the cavalry seldom came within a pike's length of them; the stunted brushwood, the broken nature of the ground, and the prostrate men and horses encumbered their advance, while the steady fire of the little square disheartened and disconcerted them. After two brave attempts to break the band of infantry, De Mesmai was compelled to recross the ford, leaving sixty dragoons killed or wounded behind him. Notwithstanding the hasty nature of their retreat, the twenty who retired with him cut down and carried off several of the straggling riflemen, dragging them across their holster-flaps by main strength of arm. Some of these they were soon compelled to drop, when galled in retreat by the fire of the victorious light infantry, who again lined the bank, and kept blazing away so long as they were within range.

"Well done 60th!" exclaimed Seaton, as he mustered the companies together. "'Tis hard to say whether the green jackets or the tartan kilts have distinguished themselves most this morning. Lamorciere's chasseurs will have need of other guides than the dragoons, if they visit the ford to-night."

"Ech! Capitan Seetun, ve hab gibben dem *der teufels braden* for breakfast,—ech, ech!" replied Blacier, cramming a quantity of tobacco into the bowl of a huge pipe, which he had pulled from the mouth of a serjeant and transferred to his own. "Someting more betterer dan *wahr-sagen* vill show dem de foord dis nicht,—de dragoons scarcely vill."

"No; I believe not, Blacier, my old boy! I shall recommend you to the notice of Sir Rowland in my account of this affair. You have long deserved the brevet."

"*Der teufel hole dich!* I tink so. Much obleege—much obleege to you."

The Germans had suffered a little in this skirmish, several having been sabred by the French; but only two Highlanders were killed, and these by carbine shots. Everywhere around the ground was strewed with helmets, holsters, sabres, carbines, and the bodies of men and of horses, rolling about in agony, or lying motionless and still in death. Sometimes a head, a boot and spur, or a gauntleted hand rose above the clear current of the Tagus, and then sunk for ever, as some wounded straggler was swept down by the stream. All the arms and accoutrements lying scattered about were, in conformity with the usual practice, dashed to pieces and completely destroyed by the victors.

"We have escaped easily in this affair," said Seaton, as he mustered his light company, "only a file of men killed; it might have been otherwise, had we formed square less promptly. You have done well, my gallant

green feathers; you will get an extra ration of grog for this morning's work!" The Highlanders responded by a cheer.

"The Germans have lost many; they lie pretty thick by the water-side."

"Owing to their own want of alacrity in answering the bugle-call. Many of them have their heads cloven down, even through the thick shako."

"This will teach the survivors to be smarter in future. But where is Lisle?"

"Stuart, by all that is sacred he has fallen into the hands of the enemy!"

"He was close beside me at the moment the bugle sounded to form square, and I have not seen him since."

"I am afraid, sir, Mr. Lisle is either killed or taen awa' prisoner," said Serjeant Macrone, whose bare knee was streaming with blood, which he endeavoured to stanch by a piece of tartan rent from a plaid.

"I saw him stagger under the stroke of a sabre at the moment the dragoons broke frae the bushes amang us," observed another serjeant, advancing his pike.

"And has any man seen him since?" asked Stuart of the company breathlessly. Angus Mackie and several others replied that they had, but their statements differed so much, that it was impossible to come to any conclusion. One declared he had seen him killed "by a cloure on the eroon, and that he never moved after it;" another stated that he slew the dragoon who wounded him, but all agreed that he had never gained the shelter of the rallying square. Evan Iverach declared, that "as sure as death he saw puir Maister Lisle grippit by the craigie, and dragged awa' by the officer of the cuirassiers." This last statement appeared the most probable, as no traces of poor Louis could be discovered on the ground save his sword and bonnet; and Stuart had a dim recollection of seeing a red uniform among a few prisoners whom De Mesmai's dragoons succeeded in carrying off amid the smoke and confusion.

From Villa Corrijos Ronald next day wrote to Alice, giving an account of her brother's capture in the skirmish at Fuente Duenna; and while he deplored the event, he said not a word of his fears that he was desperately wounded. He had very little doubt that he must have been so, otherwise De Mesmai, strong and muscular as he was, would have found it no easy task to carry off Louis in the singular manner he did.

Sir Rowland Hill, on discovering that King Joseph and Marshal Soult were manœuvring to outflank him, prepared instantly to frustrate their intentions, and give them battle. Making forced marches by day and night at the head of the British, Spanish, and Portuguese troops he had collected together, he skilfully took up a strong position in front of Aranjuez, intending there to await the arrival of the enemy.

The troops passed the Puente Largo at midnight. A detachment of miners were making preparations to blow it up; and their red lights, burning under the ancient arches, and twinkling on the sluggish waters of the Jacama, presented a singular appearance as the regiments marched above them towards the hills, where the position was taken before day-break. But no battle ensued. A despatch arrived from the Marquis of Wellington, saying that he had been forced temporarily to abandon the siege of Burgos, and order an immediate retreat into winter-quarters in Leon and Estremadura,—a sad and most unlooked-for reverse of fortune to the army, who had driven the enemy before them into Valencia and the northern provinces. Marching through the wide and fertile plains, in the midst o which rises Madrid, the second division commenced its retreat, in

obedience to this order. Passing close by the walls or earthen defences of the Spanish capital, they bivouacked at the distance of a league from it. There was no time to pitch tents, and the troops lay on the ground without them, exposed to all the misery of a most tempestuous night of wind and rain. Next night they were more comfortably lodged in the village and spacious palace of the Escurial. Ronald's light company were quartered in the royal chapel, a building which contains the tombs of all the Spanish monarchs, from Charles the Fifth down to the present age. Crossing the Guadarama, or sandy river, at a village of the same name, the great mountain was ascended, through which lies the famous Guadarama Pass, and from which an extensive view of the surrounding country is obtained.

The mountains were growing dark as the setting sun, enveloped in dun clouds, sank far behind them, and the effect of the scenery was considerably heightened by the march of so many thousand men—cavalry, infantry, and artillery—up the winding pathway among the silent and solitary defiles, disappearing, section after section, with colours waving and arms glittering, down the deep pass of the Guadarama. Afar off, on the plains of Madrid, leagues in their rear, clouds of dust rolling along the green landscape, marked where the pursuing squadrons and battalions of Soult followed the route of Sir Rowland with precision and rapidity.

On the 8th November, to cover the retreat of the whole army, and to stay Soult's advance, the first brigade was ordered to defend, to the last extremity, the town of Alba de Tormes, near the eastern borders of the ancient kingdom of Leon; a forlorn sort of duty, when it is remembered that so small a band were to oppose the concentrated French army, 90,000 strong, I believe. On being reinforced by General Hamilton's Portuguese brigade, and two companies of Spaniards under the Condé de Truxillo, every means were taken to render the place as strong as possible, by erecting trenches and barricading the streets,—almost useless precautions, as the town, which lies low, is commanded by two adjacent heights. Its appearance, when the brigade entered it, was indeed miserable and desolate, having been completely deserted by the inhabitants, into whose hearts the retreat of the British and the advance of the French had stricken terror.

The soldiers had tasted nothing for thirty-six hours; and although drenched with rain, and wearied by a hard and forced march, had to remain under arms around the old and ruinous Moorish wall of Alba, during a very chill November night. About dawn, as no enemy had yet appeared, after guards had been posted, the troops were dismissed to take up their quarters in the dreary and empty houses, where everything had been carried off or destroyed by the inhabitants before their flight. The drizzling rain which had fallen during the night, had drenched them to the skin, but a dry article of clothing was not to be had, as the baggage was far away on the road to the rear. However, doors and shutters were torn down from the houses, and blazing fires kindled on the tiled floors, around which officers and soldiers crowded together without ceremony. Another day of starvation was before them,—untold gold could not have produced an ounce of flour in Alba. At night, by the great exertions of the commissary, some horse-beans were procured, and a handful given to every man; but early next morning some muleteers arrived from Corde Villar, bringing a few small bags of flour, which were received with wild demonstrations of thankfulness and joy by the starving brigade.

Every man who could bake was set to work, and the ovens were speedily filled with *tommies*, as the poor fellows designated their loaves, and expectant crowds, with eager eyes and hollow cheeks, stood waiting around the bake-house doors.

The hot and smoking bread was scarcely brought forth for equal distribution, before the bugles sounded, and the distant reports of carbines announced that the enemy were coming on; and the picquet of the 9th light dragoons, posted in front of the town, had begun to retire before the heavy cavalry of Soult. "Stand to your arms!" was now the cry on all sides, and a scramble and uproar ensued among the soldiers at the ovens. The hot loaves were torn to pieces in handfuls and scattered about; and many who had fasted for eight-and-forty hours (the repast of horse-beans excepted) received nothing, while too much fell to the share of others.

Ronald was unfortunately among the former, as it was impossible for an officer to struggle for a mouthful of food among the men, and until that day he never knew what it was to experience the utmost extremity of hunger. But there was no help for it then; and venting a hearty malediction on the Duke of Dalmatia, he joined the light company, which lined a part of the Moorish wall facing the direction in which the enemy were momently expected to appear. The trenches, barricades, and other hastily-erected works, were manned, and two hundred of the Highland light infantry were placed in the ancient castle of Alba, a lofty round tower built by the Moors. The rest of the troops, not engaged in lining the walls, occupied those streets which would protect them from the view and fire of the enemy; and General Howard ordered a part of the regiment of sappers to undermine the bridge over the Tormes, which at Alba is both deep and rapid, to the end that it might be blown up, to cut off the pursuit of the enemy, when the British were compelled to abanden the town. The light dragoons, retiring through Alba, halted on the other side of the river to await the event, and immediately afterwards Soult's advance came in sight.

A company of infantry, the head of a column, appeared between the two hills which overlook Alba. They were beyond the range of musketry, and halting there, they ordered arms and stood at ease. Shortly afterwards a staff-officer, wearing a glazed cocked-hat and green uniform, and mounted on a spotless white steed, descended at a trot towards the town, and with the most perfect coolness walked his horse slowly before the wall, which was lined by the 50th and Highlanders, riding within fifty yards of their muskets,—a distance at which, had they fired, he must undoubtedly have been slain.

"A devilish cool fellow!" said Seaton. "He jogs easily along, looking every moment as if he expected a shot was coming to spoil his impertinent reconnoitring."

A murmur and cries of "Tak him doon! tak him doon! Gie him his kail through the reek," arose among the Highlanders, who began to look to their flints and priming.

"Weel would I like to gie that chield's pride a fa'!" said Angus Mackie, cocking his musket. "The blind hauf hunder' surely ha'na seen him. Dearsake, Captain Seaton! just say the word,—will I fire?"

"Why,—I know no objection," said Seaton, looking inquiringly towards Cameron, who was standing on foot near an angle of the trench, with old Dugald Mhor beside him holding his charger by the bridle. "Colonel, some of my fellows are anxious to fire; shall I permit them? I have some deadly shots in the light company. Monsieur's reconnoissance will end the instant Angus fires upon him."

"Shame on you, Highlanders!" exclaimed Cameron, his eyes beginning to sparkle as usual when he was excited. "Would you fire on a solitary individual, who cannot return you a shot? He is a brave soldier although a rash one, and I will never permit such a deed to be done. Keep steady, men; you will have firing enough in a short time."

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The light company were abashed, and the life of the Frenchman was saved,—a piece of generous clemency which Cameron soon had reason to repent. The staff-officer, continuing at the same deliberate pace, ascended one of the heights, where he was joined by an orderly on foot, who by his directions was seen to place eleven stones, equi-distant, around the summit. Descending past the head of the infantry column in the valley, he ascended the other eminence, and there the same movements were performed; after which they disappeared to the rear.

That French officer, who so narrowly escaped death, was MARSHAL SOULT,—the great Duke of Dalmatia himself, as one of his own despatches, which a few days afterwards fell into the hands of our troops, sufficiently testified.

Scarcely had he withdrawn, before twenty-two pieces of artillery, each drawn by four horses, ascended the heights at full gallop, and took their ground at the several marks which Marshal Soult had laid. In an instant the gunners leaped from their seats; the guns were wheeled round, with their yawning muzzles pointed to Alba; the horses were untraced, the limbers cast off, and with the speed of thought the cannoniers, all stout fellows, wearing high grenadier caps, grey great-coats with large red epaulets, were seen hard at work with sponge and rammer, charging home the cannon. Their active figures were seen more distinctly by the yellow light shed across the sky by the morning sun, the rays of which shone merrily on the glistening Tormes, the brown autumnal woods, the mouldering walls and desolate streets of Alba, where soon the work of death was to begin.

"Well, colonel," said Seaton, "what think you of this gay preparation? We shall have sixteen-pounders and long nines flying like hailstones in a minute more. You will scarcely rejoice at allowing the white steed to carry off its rider with a whole skin."

Cameron bit his lips, and his fiery eyes flashed; but he made no reply.

"Hech!" muttered an old Highlander; "it's a true sayin' at hame—Glum folk are no easy guided. Ta cornel's been makin' a fule o' hersel the day before the morn; hoomch!"

"Keep close under your walls and trenches, lads," cried Campbell, who was watching the heights through a telescope levelled across the saddle of his horse. "Keep close; but never duck down when a ball comes: as old Sir Ralph used to say, 'it looks d—ned unsoldierlike.' Here comes a shot."

A flash, and a wreath of white smoke, announced the first cannon-ball, which, striking the wall of a house, brought a mass of masonry tumbling into the street. Whiz came a second, and a third, and a fourth,—all in quick succession. The French cannonade commenced then in good earnest, and continued incessantly from ten in the morning until five in the afternoon,—firing thirteen hundred round of shot and shell, and perhaps to so hot a discharge of cannon so small a body of troops, in such a defenceless place, were never subjected before. Without the least intermission it continued for seven hours, and even then the enemy only ceased to cool their guns, and await the completion of a plan formed by Soult for surrounding and completely cutting off the defenders of Alba. It was a miracle that every man in the place was not destroyed; but the enemy chiefly expended their shot on a large empty convent, which they supposed to be full of soldiers, and in consequence levelled it to the foundations.

One sixteen-pounder came whizzing amongst the light company, and, striking the breastwork of loose earth, buried Seaton and a section of men under it; and a hearty laugh arose from the regiment, as they

scrambled out of the trench, shaking off the soil and turf which had covered them up.

Although shot were crashing, shells bursting, and houses falling incessantly for seven consecutive hours, only about fifty Highlanders were killed. The loss of the other corps I have never ascertained, but the streets were everywhere strewed with the dead. Many of the wounds were beyond conception frightful, being all by cannon-shot or bomb-splinters, tearing absolutely to pieces those they struck, and shearing off legs and arms like withered reeds. Macildhui, a serjeant, was killed as Ronald was delivering some orders to him. His head was carried away like an egg-shell, and his brains were spattered over the pavement. Night was closing, and the enemy's guns were still in position on the heights, from which another iron dose was expected in the morning, when an aide-de-camp from Salamanca, covered from plume to spur with dust, dashed into the town at full gallop, and informed General Howard that 3,000 French cavalry had forded the Tormes some miles above Alba, that his position was turned, and that the Marquis of Wellington desired he would abandon the town without a moment's delay, otherwise the first brigade were lost men. The order was instantly given to decamp, and the place was quitted double quick, the troops moving through those streets which concealed their movements from Soult, and forming in close columns on the other side of the Tormes to be in readiness for the cavalry, should they make their appearance. To deceive the French marshal, the sentries were kept on the walls until the last moment; and Stuart, with ten light-company men, was sent to "bring them off."

"Farewell, senor!" cried Truxillo, waving his sabre to Ronald over the battlements of the ancient Moorish tower, which he had volunteered to defend to the last with his two companies of Castilians, to cover the retreat of Howard's and Hamilton's brigade.

"Adieu, gallant condé!" answered Ronald, as he passed beneath the walls with his party. It was the last time he ever beheld him. By the sound of his silver whistle he collected the Highland sentinels from all points. These, with Major-general Howard, Wemyss, the brigade-major, and Ronald himself, were the last men who quitted the ruins of Alba. The mounted officers rode at a trot, and the heavily-laden infantry followed double-quick, with their muskets at the trail. The moment the bridge was cleared, the sappers sprung the mine: a roar like that of thunder shook the current of the Tormes, and a cloud of dust and stones rose into the air. Ronald, who was severely bruised by the falling fragments, cast a glance behind as he hurried along. The bridge was a mass of ruins. The Spanish flag was waving from the round tower of Alba, which was now enveloped in smoke, and flashes of musketry broke from it on all sides as the forlorn band of the condé opened a sharp fire from the rampart and loopholes upon a dense and dark column of French infantry, which was seen descending rapidly towards the town, with tri-colours flying, and brass drums beating in that peculiar manner by which the French regulate the quick step. After a desperate resistance, Truxillo and his Castilians were captured; but the sound of the firing was long heard by the brigade as it retreated in squares along the road for Ciudad Rodrigo, thus completely frustrating Soult's design to enclose and cut them off by his cavalry, who appeared in about half an hour, and met with so desperate a resistance that they were compelled to retire with immense loss.

That night the brigade halted on the skirts of a cork-wood, five leagues distant from Alba de Tormes. The half leafless branches afforded but a poor protection from the rain, which continued to pour without cessation until daybreak, when the weary march was recommenced.

It was indeed a night of misery! Although worn out with fatigue and hunger, it was impossible to sleep on the wet ground, on which the rushing rain was descending in drops larger than peas; and almost equally impossible to stand, after what had been endured for some days past,—marching from dawn till sunset laden with seventy-five pounds weight, and fasting for six-and-thirty, or eight-and-forty consecutive hours. Cursing themselves and their fate, many of the soldiers were so disheartened at the retreat, and the miseries they had undergone since they left Aranjuez, that they were often heard aloud "wishing to Heaven their brains had been blown out in Alba!"

Ronald, being sent on out-picquet, lost even the slight shelter afforded by the wood; but the soldiers had lighted prodigious fires, upon which even the power of the rain was lost; and seated by one, he passed a sleepless night, listening to the rain-drops sputtering in the flames, and to the hoarse croaking of frogs in a neighbouring marsh. During the night it was discovered that the wood was the lair of wild pigs, and a regular hunt ensued; by which means scores were shot during the glimpses of moonlight. As fast as they were killed they were quartered, and served out to the men, who crowded round the fires, broiling them on their bayonets and long steel ramrods. Major Campbell, who was a keen sportsman, and had been accustomed to shoot by moonlight at home, exerted himself so well, that with his own hand he shot five, and brought them to the bivouac, where he threw them among the soldiers. The out-picquets had been puzzled to comprehend the meaning of the firing within the wood, and Ronald was agreeably surprised by his servant bringing him a slice of wild pork, famously fried in a camp-kettle lid, and with it a *berengena* (a fruit of the cucumber genus) which he had found in the wood and reserved for his master, although almost perishing for want of nourishment himself. But the instances of Evan's fidelity are innumerable.

The contents of the camp-kettle were shared between master and man, without ceremony, and without the absence of salt or other seasoning being perceived.

For this affair of pig-shooting in the cork-wood, the commander-in-chief took the opportunity to tell the army, in a general order, that they had degenerated into "a lawless banditti," and that, without having suffered the least privation, they were in a state of mutiny and disorder. This taunting and bitter address is still remembered with peculiar annoyance by the few survivors of that brave army.

But, to return to the unhappy and unlooked-for retreat from Burgos, privations the troops *did* suffer (and I say so, in defiance of that general order), and privations such as soldiers never endured before or since. Continuing their rapid retreat across the frontier, on the evening of the 19th of November, the first brigade entered the miserable village of Robledo, in Leon; and as the soldiers halted and formed line in the street, pale, exhausted, wayworn, famished, and absolutely in rags,—shirtless, shoeless, and penniless, they seemed more like an assemblage of gaunt spectres than British men. Ronald's shirt had not been changed for ten days, nor had his beard been shaven for the same period. His shoes were completely worn away, and his bare feet had been cut and wounded by the flinty ground, while his uniform hung in fritters about him. Every officer was in the same predicament.

The military chest was empty, the stores exhausted. The cavalry and artillery horses perished in scores for want of forage; and during the whole retreat from Alba de Tormes to Robledo, the soldiers had fared on scanty rations of tough beef, horse-beans, acorns and castanos picked up by the way-side; or now and then, when the commissary could procure it,

a few handfuls of wheat served out to each officer and private—*unground*. On reaching their winter-quarters, thousands of soldiers died of sheer exhaustion, or were invalided and sent home, to become burdens to their friends, parishes, or themselves, for the remainder of their lives.

CHAPTER IV.

ANGUS MACKIE.

In the beginning of the next month the Highlanders were marched across the Sierra de Gate to the ancient city of Coria, in Estremadura, where they were to remain until they had recovered from their late fatigues, and received recruits, clothing, supplies, and arrears of pay from Lisbon. While on the march across the sierra, Evan's comrade, Angus Mackie, a soldier of whom I have made frequent mention, deserted from the light company, and, singularly enough, was discovered to have gone off in the direction of the enemy,—a circumstance which exasperated the whole regiment against him. But the true reason of poor Mackie's disappearance soon afterwards came to light.

On the second day after their arrival at Coria, the mail-bags were brought from the rear, and Ronald, who was on guard with twenty Highlanders at one of the four gates of the city, was much annoyed at being unable to inquire if any letters had come for him, and he passed the whole day in a disagreeable state of expectation and excitement. In the evening the guards were relieved, and he hurried to his billet, which was situated in one of the narrow and gloomy streets leading from the market-place towards the cathedral. At the door he was met by Evan, who informed him that "twa letters frae hame were awaiting him in his room. Major Campbell had left them there some time before."

"Foolish! Why did you not bring them to the guard-house?"

"But alake, sir! there isna ane for me," said Evan, without minding the question. "My faither micht hae sent me ae screed, and I houp that naething waur than the broon coo—(as he ay ca'd the yill), or a wee drap ower muckle o' the barley bree, have keepit him fraed."

"A light, Evan! a light! this place is very dark," cried Ronald to his retainer, who had followed him up stairs to hear what news the letter contained.

"Twa candles, sir," said he, as he lighted them. "Twa, nae less. By the alcalde's order, the auld patron body has to furnish ye wi' twa,—which maks ye 'as braw as the Laird o' Grant.' Ye mind the auld saying, I daur say?"

Ronald snatched the letters, and beheld with joy and delight that one was from Alice,—the other from his father.

"Poor Louis!" muttered he aloud; "how much I wish that he was here!" Ronald was absolutely trembling with joy as he opened the letter and prepared to read it.

He drew his chair close to the table, and raised the snuffers to trim the candles; when, lo! the lights were both blown out, and the snuffers flew from his hand with a loud report.

"Gude guide us!" exclaimed Evan, astonished at being so suddenly involved in darkness; but a hearty malediction escaped Ronald, who was chafed and infuriated with the delay this unexpected circumstance caused.

"Light them again," cried he. "Did you say that Major Campbell had been waiting for me in this room?"

"Ay, sir, a gay gude while."

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"Pshaw! this is some trick of his: he has put a pinch of powder in the snuffers. His practical joke has been somewhat mis-timed. Get me fresh lights." Although Ronald laughed heartily at this occurrence afterwards, he was greatly enraged by it at the time, and an age seemed to elapse before Evan brought him the candles again. Love-letters are interesting to those only for whom they are designed, and it is not my intention to give Miss Lisle's letter at length; but the reader, if concerned about the matter, may be assured that its contents were in every way just what Ronald could have wished them,—save in one part. She expressed her joy to hear that Louis was a prisoner, saying that he was "safer in France than fighting in Spain," and that she almost wished that Ronald himself might be captured likewise, to keep him out of harm's way.

"Evan, Jessie Cavers begs again to be remembered to you," said Ronald to his expectant follower, as he closed the letter.

"Does she really noo? The dear lassie!" cried he, snapping his fingers, while his eyes glistened with delight; and he commenced a sort of strathspey round the table. "My ain bonnie blithesome Jessie! Mony a gloaming I have spent wi' her among the sauch-tree woods o' Inchavon, and the haughs o' the Isla. Deil tak the wars and campaigning! How blithely would I gie this unco land o' teuch beef and rotten nuts, hard fechtin and wearysome marching, for auld Scotland, sae brave and sae bonnie, wi' its green grassy glens and high heather hills, its lochs and its woods! Ochone! Oh, Maister Ronald! gin we once mair saw Benmore, and fand the smell o' oor ain peat reek, I dinna think we would be in a hurry to leave hame again. And then Miss Lisle o' the big ha' house would be your ain, and my bonnie doo Jessie mine! I have written to her three times, and deil a scrap o' a letter has she sent me. She writes weil aneugh, thanks to the auld dominie at the schule o' Latheronweel. But what does the laird say? Are a' weil at oor ain ingle-neuck?"

"All, Heaven be thanked!" replied Ronald, glancing rapidly over the pages of his father's letter; "but leave me just now, Evan, and see who that is knocking in the piazzas below. I will detail the news from the glen afterwards."

His father's letter, although it contained many expressions of pride, praise, and exultation for Ronald's conduct at Almarez, was written much in the same style as his others usually were: everything was looking gloomy at home; the flocks and hirsels were perishing on the mountains, and the tenants in the glen had failed in their rents. "But they are *our* people," continued the old gentleman, "and I cannot drive them forth from the sheilings where they were born, and from the glen where the purple heather blooms so bonnily above the graves of their fathers. I cannot savagely expatriate, as other proprietors are doing daily, the descendants of those true and loyal vassals, who stood by our ancestors in danger and death during many a soul-stirring time in the years that are gone. No! I have more honour, compassion, and generosity. Poverty is their misfortune, not their crime. Heaven knows how little a space of time remains for me to be over them, as all my affairs are inextricably involved, and in a few months that letter of cautionary, granted in an evil hour to protect that rascal Macquirk, becomes due. God alone knows where I can raise the money. £8,000 will scarcely pay it, and I believe I will have to lay it down every stiver, as Macquirk has retreated to the sanctuary of Holyrood-house for protection from his creditors. Last month I was down in Edinburgh, endeavouring to procure the needful on a bond,—but in vain. Lochisla is too deeply involved already. Curse on the hour in which an honourable Highland gentleman of birth and family has to sue at and succumb to a narrow-hearted and blood-sucking

attorney! a wretch that will make a beggar of any man who is simple enough to trust him, or become entangled in the meshes of *the* profession, which, like a true old Highlander, I regard with proper hatred and contempt. D—n them all; I say, heartily; and all taxgatherers, messengers-at-arms, and excisemen likewise! Some of the last kind of intruders carried off Alpin Oig's still from *Coir nan Taischatrin*, and a great noise was made in Perth about it. Three came up the glen with a warrant for his apprehension; but I hid him in the old dungeon under the hall, where I would advise them not to try and look for him, if they wish to keep their bones whole. It was a great insult to seize the still; but I am powerless now, and can only think with a sigh of the time when my father hung two of them on the *dule tree* at the tower gate,—and no man dared to say, What dost thou? It was the day before he marched for Glenfinnan, and the unfortunate gaugers were left to feed the eagles and corbies of Benmore. Scotland was Scotland then! Dirk and claymore! was the cry when a Highland gentleman was insulted. I saw, by the papers, that young Inchavon has been taken prisoner. Well, I dare say you will not miss him much. His sister's arts have completely failed to entrap the Earl of Hyndford. He took his departure suddenly for Edinburgh last month, leaving Miss Alice to fly her hawks at lesser game."

Ronald had scarcely finished the perusal of this disheartening letter, when Evan entered hastily. "Oh, sir," said he, "I have an unco' tale to tell ye aboot my comrade Angus,—puir chield."

"How! has he been robbed by *picaros*,—slain by *guerillas*, or what?"

"O, waur than a' that."

"He deserted in the direction of the enemy; I was sorry to hear of it. He was always a favourite of mine and of Seaton's. Did he reach the French lines?"

"Eh, no, sir. Captain Blacier's riflemen fell in wi' him amang the hills, and there has been an unco' tulzie. But weel do I ken for what puir Angus deserted. It wasna the French he was awa to join; he was off for Almendralejo, sir."

"Almendralejo! Stay; I remember a story now. Surely it was not his attachment to some girl there which led him to commit so rash an act?"

"Just neething else. O Maister Ronald, ye ken weel what an unco' thing love is."

"I have seen the girl,—Maria Garcionados."

"Ay, sir,—a bonnie lassie, wi' een like slaes, cheeks redder than rowans, and skin like the drifted snaw; but she has been a deoms unlucky jo for Angus. I'll tell ye the haill story. Ye maun ken, sir, that mony months gane past, when we were quartered in Almendralejo, Angus fell over the lugs in love wi' this braw gilpie, whan we were billeted in her ain house. Ye heard frae Mr. Macdonald o' the toosle we had wi' her cuisins, and unco' auld Turk o' a faither. Hech! it was a teugh job, wi' sharp skenes and bayonets, and a' that. Weel, sir; syne the day Angus first tint sicht o' that lassie, he has never been the same rattling, roaring kind o' chield he was; but ay wae and dowie, soughing and sighing till it was gruesome to hear him. Yesterday, or the day before it, when coming-ower the hills,—ye mind the bit clachan we stoppit at for a night's rest?"

"Los Cazas de Don Gomez?"

"Ay, sir, just sae,—a deevil o' a lang nebbit name! At a wine-house there Angus and I forgathered wi' a muleteer loon frae Almendralejo,—Lazaro Gomez, he ca'd himsel. Ye'll may be mind o' him?"

"Perfectly; but be quick with your story."

"Aweel, sir, the mule-driver gied us a' the news and clashin frae aboot

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Merida and ither places, and amang ither things tauld Angus that auld Sancho Garcionados,—or *el Pioero*, as the Spaniards ay ca' a lawyer, was gaun to compel the lassie, whether she wad or no, to marry a rich alcalde. Od, sir; I never saw a face change as puir Mackie's did, while the carrier callant chatted awa wi' us in his broken English, never kennin' the while that ilka word was fa'in like scaudin' lead into the heart o' puir Angus. He came to me that nicht at tatto beat, and said he could thole this life no anither minute, and that—come weal, come wae, he would gang off for Almendralejo, and save the lassie or dee wi' her. I did a' I could to pacify him, but he minded me nae mair than the wind whistlin' ower the muir. He came to me whan I was on sentry at the toon end. His een were glistening, his face was white, like that o' something no cannie, and his gartered knees were chaffing thegither. I grew eerie to look at him, for the nicht was dark and gloomy, and the wind came soughing doon frae the hills wi' a sound like the moan o' a deid man. Ae starnie was glintin on the hill-tap, and I saw the reflection o'd in the rinnin water,* which passes the toon wa's. Angus stretched his hands towards the bit starnie, and said it was shinin' ower Almendralejo then,—and may be his ain true love was lookin' at it; and that it hung like a lamp in the mirky, left to guide him to whar she bided.

"'Hoots, havers!' said I, 'ye'll sune get ower'd; and may be that gomeral mule-driver's story o' auld Sancho's dochter was a' a lee,—every word o't. Gang hame to your bed, my man, and ye'll be better the morn.'

"But he just gied an unco' sough, and wrung my loof, gaed doon the brae, and left me. Next morning Serjeant Macrone reported him absent frae parade, and then I kent that he had taen to the hills and was awa'. The black een o' that Spanish lass hae cuisten' a glamourie ower him waur than witchcraft. Amang the hills he fell in wi' Captain Blacier's company o' the 60th, some o' wha spiered the gate he was gaun. Angus couldna or wadna tell, and a fray o' some kind ensued atween him and the German loons: in the middle o't, Angus drew his bayonet on auld Blacier, for which he now lies in airns in ane o' the square toors o' Coria."

"O the fool! Attempted to stab Blacier, did he?"

"Ay, an vera nigh stickit him i' the wame. Puir Angus! he ay hated thae thrawn gebbit Hanoverian dogs, as he ca'd them; for his faither, like yer ain, had been out in the forty-five,—wi' the Prince sae bauld and braw."

"The unfortunate madman! he will surely die. It is death, by the articles of war, to draw weapon upon an officer."

"So Serjeant Macrone says; but alake! Maister Ronald, I houp it will no come to that. Blacier is only a German, ye ken," said Evan, while his eyes began to glisten. "Surely the Cornel, Captain Seaton, or may be yoursel, will get him ower it. Angus and me hae ever been cronies and brithers syne the first day we met at La Nava, and I would be unco' laith to lose him noo. Ye ken hoo dowie ye were yoursel for mony a lang day after brave Maister Louis fell into the claws o' thae taid-eating loons, and no a' Maister Macdonald's jokes or merriment could rouse ye."

"Prepare yourself for the worst, Evan. Your poor friend will certainly die, if this crime is proved against him." * * * *

Stuart was one of the members of the general court-martial ordered to try this case, in which desertion was coupled with a flagrant act of insubordination. The court met in the palace of the bishop, as there was not another house in Coria containing an apartment fit for the purpose,—the town being very inconsiderable, having only about fifteen hundred inhabi-

* The Alagona river, which passes Coria.

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tants, although strongly defended by walls, towers, gates, and a very singular fortress, the ascent to which is by a flight of upwards of a hundred steps. From this stronghold Mackie was brought before the court which was to decide his doom.

The room in which it met was gloomy and old, and the dim light from four mullioned windows fell uncertainly on the war-worn uniforms and well-bronzed faces of the officers seated around the table, on which lay paper, pens and ink, a bible, and the articles of war. The president, the Hon. Colonel Cadogan, of the Highland Light Infantry, sat at the head; the judge-advocate, an officer of cavalry, stood at the foot of the table to read the charges,—the members taking their places according to their rank; the seniors on Cadogan's right, the juniors on his left. After the court had been sworn, by the president holding forth the bible, and every officer laying his hand upon it and swearing "duly to administer justice according to the rules and articles now in force for the better government of his Majesty's forces, without partiality, favour, or affection," the proceedings commenced. Pale, dejected, and apparently cast down to the lowest depths of mental misery, the unfortunate young Highlander stood before the military tribunal. His red coat, threadbare and patched with divers colours, his frittered tartans, and a deep scar on one of his sun-burnt knees, another on his cheek, gained at Corunna,—all bore witness for him of the service he had seen, but which was little cared for there, as all had served alike. Tall and erect he stood before them, glancing from one to another in a firm but respectful manner. One by one the evidences against him were examined, and he found no fault with what any man said of him. Seaton and Serjeant Duncan Macrone stated the time when his absence was first discovered, and the former spoke highly of his general character and conduct, and acquainted the court that his life had been twice saved by the prisoner,—first at the battle of Fuentes de Honore, in May, 1811; and again at Arroya del Molino in the November of the same year, when he was encountered by two aides-de-camp of the Prince d'Aremberg during the action. Honest old Blacier, although the most aggrieved party, was unwilling to be the means of depriving the Highlander of existence, and taking his pipe from his mouth, gave his evidence with marked backwardness; he concluded by saying, "Dat he believed de *henckers knecht* vas under de influence ob de pig-skins, or *der teufel*, or *zauberei*, vich means de vitshcraft, and I vould not hab it on my conscience dat I occasioned a young man's being shot and sent to *der teufel* for showing a bare blade ven his bloodt vas up; and I hope de coort vill recommendt him to de tender mercy ob Lord Vellington, so dat he may be shaved."

"Your wishes, with those of Captain Seaton, shall have due consideration with the court, Captain Blacier," replied the president; and the rifleman withdrew, puffing vehemently with his long pipe. When called upon to make his defence, the prisoner had little to say. He knew that any attempts to extenuate his double crime would be perfectly unavailing, and his knowledge of the rules of the service led him to anticipate his doom. Yet his keen grey eye never quailed or grew less bright, and his voice never faltered while he addressed the court in the following manner:—

"Weel do I ken, sirs, that I have been acting wrang,—unco' wrang. I hae been guilty, in sae far that I abandoned my quarters, and was awa amang the hills; but I deny solemnly, and may I be haulden mansworn, if ever I ettled to desert, or gae ower to the enemy's colours. I was clean wud, and kenned na' at the time whar I was danderin' to. I tell your honours the truth, and I would scorn to affirm it wi' an aith, because I never tauld a lee in a' my days, and hae nae need to fib or flaw noo. But, sirs, I think there isna ane in this room that wadna hae dune as I did that nicht, when I

kent that I was on the brink o' losing for ever and ay the winsome lass to whom I had plighted heart and troth; and I will affirm, gentlemen, that neither the danger or disgrace o' haeing it imputed to me that I abandoned my standard, could keep me frae trying to save her frae sic a tyrannical and avaricious auld carle as her faither. It has been said, in the 'crime,' that I was gaun the gate to the enemy's lines. Ablins I was, and ablins I wasna, for I was wading through a sea o' desperation,—I was dumbfounded and gane gyte that nicht, and it was a' after I had bent the bicker a gay gude while, as my comrade Evan Iverach has tauld unto ye.

"O sirs! I hope that ye will neither flog nor degrade me; but let me dee the death my crime is said to merit. Let me dee noo,—noo that I hae broucht sorrow and wae, sorrow and disgrace to my honest faither's fireside; for though he is but a puir auld cottar body at Braemar, it will bring his bald head to the grave if he hears I hae come to the halberts,*—it would be sic an awfu' disgrace! the haill kintra-side wad ring wi't. Let me rather die, sirs: I say again,—a hundred times I hae faced death, and I can easily face him ance mair. But it is whan I think o' my faither and mother at hame amang the heather hills,—struggling wi' eild and wi' poortith,—the ane herdin' sheep in bonnie Glenclunaidh amang the lang yellow broom, and the ither spinnin' hard at the ingle-neuk, whar I hae sae aften toddled at her knee,—'tis whan I think o' them that I am ready to orp and greet, and that my stout heart fails me,—a heart, sirs, that never failed on mony a bluidy day. I hae nae mair to say, your honours, but just that I humbly thank ye for hearing me sae lang, and that I wad as sune dee as live."

This address, which was delivered with considerable vehemence and gesture, and spoken in a very northern and provincial dialect, was very little understood by those members of the court who were not Scotsmen; and Ronald Stuart, whose heart yearned with a truly Scottish love towards his countryman, explained to them the substance of what Mackie had said. He was found guilty of the seventh and eleventh articles in the second section of the articles of war; viz. desertion,—aggravated by an intention to join the enemy, and drawing, or offering to draw, upon "a superior officer." He was sent back to the fortress of Coria, and the proceedings and sentence of the court were despatched to head-quarters, with strong recommendations to mercy from Colonel Cadogan, and from Fassifern: but many months elapsed before an answer was returned, and during all that time the poor Highlander pined in the noisome vaults of the castle or fort of Coria. But of him, more anon.

In consequence of the approach of the French under General Foy, the first brigade moved from Coria while the sentence of the unfortunate Mackie remained unknown,—every member of a court-martial being sworn to solemn secrecy. The 50th regiment occupied Bejar, so famous for its mineral wells, and some sharp fighting ensued in its neighbourhood; but Foy's troops were completely routed with great loss. The Highlanders occupied the beautiful village of Banos, which lies secluded in a deep and narrow valley between Leon and Estremadura, surrounded on every side by abrupt precipitous mountains, which are covered to their rugged summits by the richest foliage; but amid their caverns, fastnesses, and dingles lurk herds of wolves, the wildness and ferocity of which keep the inhabitants in a continual state of terror and alarm; and so daring had these savage animals become, that it was necessary to keep large fires burning at night around the village, to scare them from the posts of the sentinels.

Soon after the regiment arrived at Banos, the sentence of Angus Mackie was ordered to be put in execution, having been approved of by the proper

* The triangles: three pikes were used in those days.

authorities. On the retreat from Burgos some symptoms of insubordination had appeared among the other brigades, when the soldiers became maddened by the miseries they underwent; an officer of "the buffs" had been shot by a soldier of that regiment. In other corps discipline seemed almost set at nought, and it was determined that an example should be made. The private of the 3rd regiment was hanged, and Angus Mackie, who, although far less criminal, had been convicted of desertion and insubordination, was sentenced to be shot to death in presence of his comrades, who among themselves deeply pitied and deplored that so gallant a lad should suffer so severe a sentence for his exaggerated crime. No charge of injustice could be laid to the account of the court which tried him, the "finding" of its members having been regulated by the stern but necessary articles of the Mutiny Act. Many months had passed away since his trial; the first excitement of the affair had died away, and during all that time he had been confined in the dreary fort of Coria,—a sufficient punishment alone for the crime he had committed.

This unhappy affair cast a gloom over the whole regiment,—a gloom which was apparent in every face, as the unwilling Highlanders paraded in the valley of Banos to witness his execution.

It was in the month of May, 1813; the evening was a still and beautiful one. The sun was verging towards the west, and his crimson rays streamed through the deep dark dell, upon the vine-clad cottages and sylvan amphitheatre of Banos. Concentrated in that narrow and gloomy glen, where the immense mountains rose on every side to the height of many hundred feet, and where crags and rocks shot up in cones and fantastic spires, almost excluding the light of day from the little huts at the bottom of the dell, were the seventeen infantry regiments of the second division, together with the cavalry, drawn up on the steep faces of the hills, so that the rear ranks might overlook the front. The *paisanos* of the secluded village, awe-struck at the unusual scene, and the sight of so many thousand steel weapons glittering amid such dense masses of foreign soldiers, forsook their cottages and clustered together on the summit of a steep rock, to behold the fatal event. The troops formed three faces of a hollow square; the rock upon which the peasants were congregated occupied the vacant space. A spot of velvet turf, the village green, stretched to the foot of it, and there was dug a grave,—a grave for the yet living man; the wet damp earth heaped up on one side of it, the rolls of turf and a rough deal coffin lay on the other. Near these stood the bass-drum of the Gordon Highlanders; a bible and a prayer-book lay open upon its head.

The Highlanders formed the inner faces of the square.

All was solemn silence and expectation; not a whisper was heard through all that dense array; not a sound smote the ear save the rustle of the summer foliage, as the evening wind stirred the tall chesnuts or rich green cork-trees which nodded from the black precipices. The general, the staff and field-officers were all on horseback, but remained motionless. At last it was known that the doomed man was approaching, and the arms of the escort that conducted him were seen flashing in the sunlight, as they descended from the hill-tops by the winding pathway which led to the bottom of the valley. Sir Rowland Hill touched his hat to an aide-de-camp, who then passed among the troops at a hand gallop, whispering to each commanding officer; the words of command to fix bayonets and shoulder arms were immediately given, and before the varying tones of the different colonels died away, the prisoner appeared amid the square surrounded by his escort, under charge of the provost-marshal. His own corps, I have said, was in front, and he moved slowly along the silent

ranks with downcast eyes towards the spot where his grave and coffin lay displayed. He drew near the former, and cast a glance into its gloomy depth, and, shuddering, turned his back upon it, muttering: "I would just be sax and twenty the morn. Sax and twenty! oh, it's an unco thing to dee sae young. O my faither—my mither!" he groaned aloud! "farewell to you—to auld Scotland, and a' I hae loed sae lang and weel! It will be a sair trial to my kinsfolk in Glenclunaidh, when they see my name on the kirk doors o' Braemar—as ane that has dee'd wi' disgrace on his broo."*

He was clad in his white undress-jacket and kilt, and stood bareheaded, with his bonnet in his hand. He was pale and emaciated with long confinement, but his bearing was firm and as soldier-like as ever. His eyes seemed unusually bright, and at times a red flush crossed his otherwise deadly pale cheek. There were two aged monks from the San Ferdinando convent of Candeleria present, but the Highlander refused to hear or communicate with them. Yet the honest friars were determined not to abandon him in his last hour, and withdrawing to a little distance, they placed a crucifix against a fragment of rock, and prayed earnestly, with true Catholic fervour, to that all-wise Power above, before which the soul of one they deemed a heretic was so soon to appear.

There was no chaplain present with the troops; but the prisoner was attended by the venerable Dugald-Mhor, who walked slowly beside him bareheaded, with his bonnet under his arm. He read portions of the Scripture from an old dog-eared bible, which he produced from his *sporran mollock*; and the low solemn tones in which he read could be distinctly heard by all, so very still was the place; and as the hand of the village-clock approached the hour at which the soldier was to die, a deeper sadness fell upon the hearts of the beholders, who, although long accustomed to all the heart-harrowing scenes of war, had never before witnessed a death in so solemn and peculiar a manner.

Mackie and his attendant sung together the hymn—

"The hour of my departure's come," &c.

and when it was concluded, the hand of the clock on the alcalde's house wanted but five minutes of the hour. The soldier cast a hasty glance towards it, and, falling upon his knees, covered his face with his hands and burst out into an agony of prayer, from which he was only aroused by the seven strokes of the last hour he would ever hear on earth striking from the dull-toned bell.

His last moment was come.

When the sound ceased, Cameron of Fassifern and his field-officers dismounted from their horses, which were led away, and the provost-marshal drew up a section of twelve soldiers opposite where the prisoner yet knelt on the turf.

Many of his comrades now took their last farewell of him; and Evan Iverach, to whom he had given seven pounds, saved from his pay while prisoner at Coria, to send to his parents at Braemar, retired to his place in the ranks with tearless eyes,—because Evan had a mistaken idea, that to have shown signs of deep emotion would have been unmanly. But that night, in his billet, honest Evan wept like a woman for the loss of his comrade and friend. During the bandaging of Mackie's eyes, Fassifern took off his bonnet, and kneeling down, commanded his regiment to do so likewise. As one man, the Highlanders bent their bare knees to the sod,

* By the military regulations, the names of soldiers who behave meritoriously, or misbehave themselves grossly, are affixed to the church-doors of the parish in which they were born. In Highland regiments the threat of informing friends at home of a soldier's misconduct was sufficient to keep him in order for the time to come.

joining, as they did so, in the solemn psalm which Dugald and the prisoner had begun to sing. It was a sad and mournful Scottish air, one which every Scotsman present had been accustomed to hear sung in their village kirks or fathers' cottages in boyhood. It softened and subdued their hearts, carrying back their recollections to their childhood, and to years that had passed away into eternity. Many heard it chanted then for the first time since their native hills had faded from their sight; and as the strain died away through the deep and narrow vale of Banos, it found an echo in every breast.

Dugald closed his bible, and, placing a handkerchief in the hand of the prisoner, withdrew, and covering his wrinkled face with his bonnet, knelt down also. Now came the duty of the provost-marshal, whose unwilling detachment consisted of twelve picked men, of disorderly character, on whom, as a punishment, fell the lot of slaying their comrade.

With his eyes blindfolded, the unfortunate Highlander knelt down between his coffin and his grave, and, without quivering once, dropped his handkerchief.

"Section!" cried the provost-marshal, "'ready—present—*fire!*" The words followed each other in rapid succession, and the echoes of the death-shot were reverberated like thunder among the hills around. A shriek burst from the females of the village. Red blood was seen to spout forth from many a wound in the form of the prisoner; he sprung convulsively upwards, and then fell backward dead on the damp gravel, which was so soon to cover him.

The hearts of all began to beat more freely; but at that moment the red sun sank behind the darkening hills, and a deeper gloom enveloped Banos, the effect of which was not lost on the minds of the beholders.

All was over now! The corse lay stretched on the ground, and the smoke of the musketry was curling around the grave which yawned beside it. Cameron sprung on his horse, and his voice was the first to break the oppressive silence. The shrill pipes sounded, and the rattling drums beat merrily in the re-echoing vale, as corps after corps marched past the spot where the body of Mackie, though breathless, lay yet bleeding, and moved up the winding pathway towards the pass of Banos, whence by different routes they marched to their cantonments in the villages and camps among the mountains. When all had passed away, the pioneers placed the dead man in his coffin, and covered him hurriedly up; the sods were carefully deposited over and beaten down with the shovel; and the grave of the man who had been living but ten minutes before, presented now the same appearance as the resting-place of one who had been many years entombed. The weeds and the long grass waved over it.

The village *paisanos* placed a rough wooden cross above it, to prevent, as they said, "the heretic from haunting the resting-place of his bones;" and near this rude emblem was placed a vine, which Evan Iverach tended daily,—clearing its root of weeds and encumbrances, watching and pruning the stem, and long before the regiment left Banos he had twined it around and hidden the limbs of the cross; and when the Highlanders marched from the valley, as they wound through a deep defile among the mountains, Evan's farewell look was cast to the place where the vine-covered cross marked the grave of his comrade.

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CHAPTER V.

AN ADVENTURE.—A HIGHLAND LEGEND.

BEFORE the regiment left Banos to take the field again, Ronald had an unlooked-for adventure with a fierce denizen of the neighbouring mountains, which nearly cost him his life.

There was a certain part of the hills, from which the valley of Banos strongly resembled his native place, Strathonan, but on a much smaller scale; and thither Stuart was in the habit of repairing almost daily, to indulge freely in those long reveries so usual to a Highlander, and enjoy the beauty of the prospect which bore so near a resemblance to his home. A slight effort of the imagination made it at once Strathonan, near the source of that celebrated trout-stream, the Isla; but the sound of the guitar and castanets came on the wind instead of the war-pipe of Albyn, and destroyed the illusion. There were neither bucks nor roes bounding over the mountain-slope; and instead of the plaided shepherd or agile huntsman starting from the copsewood, a lazy yet handsome Spanish peasant appeared at times, sauntering slowly along, clad in his short brown jacket tied round the waist by a broad yellow scarf, leather gaiters bound with red thongs, a cigar in his mouth, a staff in his hand, and a stiletto in his girdle. Often did a figure wearing this romantic dress, or enveloped in a huge brown mantle, appear on the solitary pathways of the hills. Far down below, on the village green, instead of the lively strathspey or martial *gilliechallium*,* the graceful fandango or bolero was danced by the athletic *paisanos* and olive-cheeked girls of the valley.

His patron had often warned him of the danger which he incurred, by wandering so far among mountains so much infested by wolves; but Stuart always considered himself safe enough, as he never went without his sword and dirk. His host acquainted him with many wonderful tales of men having been killed and devoured by them among the wild places; and said that, within his recollection, nearly twenty children had been carried off from the very heart of the village.

"Senor," said he, on one occasion, "you can know little of the nature of the wolf, as perhaps there are none now in your country; but they have the cunning of the fox, together with the strength and ferocity of the tiger. On entering the village in the evening, he moves about with careful and stealthy paces; and when he seizes on a child, grasps it by the throat so as to prevent it giving a single cry, and bears it away to the recesses among the hills. I have known of a lad of fourteen being carried off thus. A man belonging to the village, a brave guerilla of Mina's band, was attacked one evening in the pass of Banos by a band of wolves. He slew three with his rifle and poniard, but the others tore him to fragments. This brought the attention of senores the alcaldes of the valley† to the matter, and they offered a reward of eighty reals, or four duros, for each wolf's head brought to their houses, and forthwith war was proclaimed against these fierce inhabitants of the sierras.

"A dozen hides and heads were brought in weekly, and we continued this dangerous sport until the British entered the valley, when firing in the neighbourhood could no longer be continued. Since we acted upon the offensive, the wolves have become more shy, and never enter the vale, but

* Sword dance.

† Banos is divided into two districts, each ruled by its own alcalde; the northern part of the village lies in Leon, and the southern in Estremadura.

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it is death to encounter the herds on their own ground; therefore I would pray you, senor, if you value your own safety, never to wander about as you are pleased to do."

Ronald thanked the worthy vine-dresser for his advice and good wishes, but laughed at his fears about the wolves, and told him that while he was armed with his sword, he considered himself secure against any such antagonists; and so continued to ramble about as usual.

One evening, while he was surveying the valley from his old post when the sun was setting, he became overpowered with the heat of the atmosphere and the fatigue of a long walk, and fell fast asleep beside a rude wooden cross, erected to mark the spot where the only *abogado* who ever appeared in Banos had been poniarded by his first client for unfair dealing. How long Stuart slept there he had no idea, but while dreaming that he had that worthy clerk to the royal signet, Mr. Macquirk, among the mountains of Banos, even close to the abogado's cross, and was about to take summary vengeance upon him for the manner in which he had bamboozled and swindled the old gentleman at Lochisla, he was awakened in a very disagreeable manner by something grasping him roughly by the throat. With the rapidity of light, all the stories he had heard of the wolves flashed upon his memory. He was fully awake in an instant, and found himself grappling and struggling savagely with one of those terrible animals, by moonlight, on a solitary hill-side many miles away from the village, where the watch-fires of the guard-houses could be seen twinkling afar off at the bottom of the deep valley, likered stars. His brass gorget, and the massive lace on the collar of the coat, together with a stout military stock, had saved his neck from the fangs of the gigantic wolf, which, by straining every energy of strength and courage, or rather desperation, he grasped with a ferocity almost equal to its own, and retaining his hold, threw upon the turf beside him. Its struggles were terrible, and his hands, which encircled its tough and brawny throat, were torn by its claws; yet he never relaxed his iron clutch until the breath and strength of his antagonist began to fail, and then putting his right hand to his side for his Highland dirk, he remembered with rage and anguish that it was left behind at his billet. The moment was indeed a critical one. Two other wolves were approaching the spot cautiously, and Stuart, remembering how often he had heard of their overpowering man by numbers, considered himself for ever lost. It was like some horrible dream, and his heart became filled with an agony of horror and alarm which it had never known before.

"Heaven help me now!" gasped he. "Ah! had I only my dirk, or even a *skene-dhu*, they would be welcome." He cried aloud for aid, but the cries were feeble, as his tongue was swollen and clove to his palate with the keenness of his terror; and ere the echoes of his last shout died away, he was struggling with the others, and was endeavouring to elude their fangs by rolling over and over, and fighting fiercely with hands and feet. Scarcely had the two wolves come to the aid of their half-burked comrade, ere Stuart imagined that other sounds than the echoes of his cry reverberated through the wilderness. It was—what? the halloo of a true Highland huntsman!

"Hoigh! Diaoul! what's a' this?" cried Dugald Mhor Cameron, plunging headlong among them, with a long dirk gleaming in his right hand and a *skene-dhu* in his left. One wolf fled, another was pierced thrice to the vitals by Dugald's dirk, and rolled away for several yards, tearing up the earth in rage and agony, until it was finally destroyed by the sharp black knife being drawn across its thick throat by Dugald, who handled it well, being an adroit deer-stalker. The other savage, which had been so gallantly grasped by Ronald, he despatched by repeated stabs

of the dirk, which he drove home to the hilt, sending eighteen inches of cold iron into the body at every stroke. While this passed, poor Stuart, exhausted and overcome, sank backward on the turf, just as Fassifern rode up with his claymore drawn.

"I trust we have not been too late," he cried earnestly, as he leapt from his horse, which had been snorting and shying aside from the scene of the fray. "I am sure, Dugald, we answered to his first cry. He is one of ours; an officer too,—Stuart, by heavens!"

"But for Dugald's prompt and gallant succour, all would have been over with me by this time, colonel," said Ronald, as with difficulty he staggered up from the turf, which was plentifully besprinkled with the blood of his enemies.

"Are you hurt in any way?" was the eager inquiry of both.

"My hands are torn a little; but my sash and coat are all rent to fritters."

"How opportunely Dugald came to save you!"

"Opportune, indeed! I will never be able to repay him for this night's work."

"Ochone! Mr. Stuart," replied the old man, who was cleaning his weapons in his plaid, "dinna say a word about thanks; keep a' them for the kornel there."

"I was coming over the mountains from Candeleria," said Fassifern, "where I have been president of a court-martial. Your cries alarmed us within a few yards of this old cross, and my horse began to snort and rear, refusing to advance a step; but trusty Dugald went headlong on, and with his short weapons, I see, has done you right good service. 'Tis well the matter is no worse, and had the wolves not given you so severe a mauling, Stuart," added the colonel with a smile, as he put his foot in his stirrup, "I should have sent Claude for your sword again. You know you should never be without your arms, or forget the order against strolling more than two miles from camp or quarters. By my word, these were no ordinary foes to contend with, these wolves; they are larger than Highland shelties, and their skins will be a prize for the *paisanos* in the morning, for Dugald is, of course, too proud to take fee or reward from the alcaldes."

"I have escaped their maws by a miracle," said Stuart, yet gasping with the excitement of the fierce struggle.

"By nae miracle at all, sir," said old Dugald, "by nae miracle; but just by the help o' a teuch auld carle's hand and the bit cauld iron; and I assure your honours, I wad rather face a thoosand rampaugin wolves, than ae kelpie, habgoblin, wraith, spunkie, sheeted ghaist, deadlicht, broonie, or ony ither scrap o' deevildom sae common at hame in the Hielands. Hoich, sirs! it was indeed nae sma' matter to cut the weasens o' thae awfu' monsters o' wolves; but," said he, holding aloft his long Highland dagger, which flashed back the rays of the moon, "but that is a blade that has rung on the target o' the *lham-dearg;* and after *that,* what could a bold hand not do wi' it?"

"On the target of whom?" asked Ronald.

"The *lham-dearg*, sir."

"The words are Gaelic; but who is he?"

"A spirit wi' a bloody hand, that haunts at the mirk hour the wood o' Glenmore, in the Grants' country."

"What has this to do with your dirk?" said Stuart, who became interested in everything which looked like a northern legend.

"Pooh!" said Cameron; "'tis an old ghost story, and not one of Dugald's prime ones. But he is as prosy with his legends, as Colin Campbell is about Egypt and Ralph Abercrombie."

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"He doesna believe it noo," muttered Dugald, shaking his white hairs sorrowfully; "but when he was a bairn at hame in Fassifern-house, I hae made his vera lugs tingle wi' fear at the name o' the *lham-dearg*, and he used to grane and greet for a licht that he micht see to sleep, as he said; and in thae days he wadna hae gane into a dark place, to be made king o' the braw Highlands frae Castle Grant to Lochaber. But noo wars and campaigning hae learned him to scoff at a' thae matters, though his faither, the laird (gude guide him !), a man as auld as mysel, believes every word o' them. I daursay, he doesna believe noo that deidlichts burn on the piper's grave in the auld kirk-yaird at hame; or that spunkies and fairies bide in the glen o' Auchnacarry, kelpies in Loch-Archaig, or that the *daoine shie* haunt the dark holes, cairns, round rings, and unco' places o' the Corrie-nan-gaul in Knoydart, where I mysel hae seen them dancing tulloch-gorm in the bonnie moonlicht."

"Certainly not, Dugald. What I believed when a child, will scarcely pass now for truth; and I believe you never saw anything unearthly until Ferintosh had swelled your belt to bursting. Come, Dugald, acknowledge this to be true," said Cameron, laughing.

"May be ye'll no believe in the *red-cap*, that haunts the auld tower at Archaig; and may be no in the vera *taisch?*" said the old servitor in a voice approaching to a groan at the other's apostasy. "Ochone, may be no! although I mysel saw bluid on his hand, and tauld him o' it the day before the shot struck him there at the battle of Arroya del Molino."

"Dugald," said the colonel, "I will not argue with you about the second sight, because I know you have some pretensions to the character of a *taischatr*. You certainly have me at vantage there, and your prediction about the shot at Arroya came true; and exactly twenty-four hours after you said my hand dropped blood, a musket-shot passed through it. A very singular coincidence indeed."

"It was nane," replied the old Gael firmly, "it was nane; and I saw the shot before it came, because there was a wreath before my een, and a' the power o' the *taisch* was in me."

"Well, Stuart, what think you of the second sight?"

Ronald was loath to express his disbelief in this superstition, which found a disciple in the colonel, and so hesitated to reply.

"I see you are too true a Highlander to disbelieve in its existence, and yet you are reluctant to acknowledge the truth," said Fassifern laughing, while he mistook the other's meaning. "But let us reach Banos, and over some of the bottled sherry which I lately got from Lisbon we will discuss these matters, and hear Dugald's story of the spirit of Glenmore, which, if you are at all superstitious, might have too much effect if related by him in Gaelic by moonlight, and on a lonely hill-side."

This proposal was at once accepted, and they began to descend the narrow and winding pathway which led from the rugged summits of the sierra towards the village. Dugald advanced in front, leading the horse of Cameron, who followed behind with Stuart. The latter thanked his stars for escaping from his late encounter so easily, having only sustained a few severe scratches and bruises. While enjoying some of the colonel's pure bottled sherry, a rarity in Spain, where the wine is ever kept in greasy hog-skins, Ronald soon forgot his disagreeable adventure at the abogado's cross. Dugald, who, in consideration of his venerable age and relationship to Fassifern (being a fortieth cousin or so), was seated at the table, partook of the wine, and to wile away the time, related in Gaelic the Highland legend he had referred to. Many readers may consider it a foolish, perhaps an intrusive tale altogether; but had they heard it far away from home, in a hut at Banos, related in expressive and poetical Gaelic by such

a reverend and warrior-looking old man as Dugald Cameron, it would have had a very different effect from what it can ever produce when related in plain and unvarnished English, stripped of all the Ossianic description and style in which Ronald Stuart first heard it.

The Lham-Dearg.

"My story commences at the close of the fatal,—ay, sirs, I may say the most deplorable battle of Culloden; a battle which laid prostrate for ever the hopes of a gallant prince, the cause of an illustrious house, and the energies of a brave and loyal people, and proved that *right* may contend in vain against *might*, and that justice must sometimes yield to the overwhelming majority of brute force. I was then but a wild Highland boy of fifteen, and followed the clan-regiment of the noble Lochiel, upon whom I attended as a sort of page, to carry his target and scabbard on the march. My brave old father, too, was in the battle; and being, in consequence of his relationship to the chief, a front rank man, he greatly distinguished himself in that desperate but unavailing charge we made on the troops of the Elector, after foolishly enduring a cannonade which miserably thinned our numbers. Ah, sirs! had we at first rushed on them with the broadsword, as was ever our wont, another race would have filled the throne at this hour; but when we did charge, Cumberland's two lines were swept before our long blades like winnowed chaff upon the gale. Even then the day seemed ours, when the fire of the third compelled us to recoil. Ochone! let me think of it no more, for I grow wild at times when the memory of these days swells up in my withered heart, and the dangers, the glory, and the chivalry of the 'forty-five' are all remembered with mingled pride and sorrow. I was but a child then, and yet on that bloody day I shot dead several of Barrel's regiment, while the Camerons were among them, hewing them down like willow-wands with axe and claymore.

"In the route which followed, I fled away with our wounded chieftain, and gained a place of safety among the hills; but my father was taken captive by the Campbells from the west country, and so he was one of the few who escaped the death decreed to all by the bloody mandates of the German duke, whose memory will be abhorred and execrated while grass grows and water runs in the land of the Gael.

"It is of my father's adventures I have now principally to speak.

"He was disarmed and manacled by the false sons of Diarmed, and from amidst them he beheld the merciless red-coats slaying, murdering in cold blood, the helpless and unresisting wounded by spontoon and bayonet, by the sword and volleys of musketry; while the relentless Cumberland rode about the muir of Drummossie with his staff, treading down the hearts of better and braver men than ever will come of his tribe.

"The sun set that night on a field of blood, and one of woe and desolation to the Highlanders.

"Those wretched prisoners, whom the blood-glutted soldiers were too weary to slaughter, were, to the number of four hundred and forty men, enclosed in a hollow square, surrounded by the regiments of Barrel, Wolfe, and Bligh, who hemmed them in with fixed bayonets, and subjected them to every taunt and insult that national hatred, the meanest malice and cowardice when most triumphant, could suggest. Amongst other brave and unfortunate clansmen my father listened to them; his bosom swelled with rage and agony, and he longed to burst his bonds and leap like a tiger headlong upon them. But he was powerless, unarmed, and ironed, rather like some base malefactor than a gentle-blooded *duinhewassel* of the clan Cameron. The cutting taunts of Bligh's soldiers roused at last even the ire of Colonel Campbell of the Argyleshire men, and his

blood became fired at the gross abuse lavished upon his countrymen. Stepping forward with his sword drawn, he sternly commanded them to be silent, and said that he would wager his commission against a crown-piece, that any Highlander there would meet in equal arms, and vanquish the best man present that wore a scarlet coat.

"'Ha! do you say so, sir?' cried the duke, who with his staff was in the centre of the square.

"'May it please your highness, I do most assuredly,' said Campbell, raising his bonnet; 'and I long to see the matter put to the test, to cure these southron gentry of their unwarrantable insolence. By my faith, they seem to forget the good use they made of their heels at Preston and Falkirk!'

"'And you will stand to your wager, colonel?'

"'My commission to a crown-piece.'

"'Done!' said the duke. 'Your bet is a fatal one, as you will find to your cost, ere many minutes pass away. Your very words savour of Jacobitism and treason; and your commission shall certainly be lost, if your rebel beats not a champion of my choosing. My friend, Major Von Thunderbotham, of Bligh's, may consider your command as his already.'

"'By Heaven! your highness, no dog of a Hessian that ever wore a head shall command the men of Macallummore's race!' replied Campbell bluntly, and regardless of the consequences.

"A gigantic dragoon of Cobham's horse offered himself readily as the duke's champion; and on his colonel bearing testimony of his strength, activity, and expertness with his weapon, he was accepted. In his broken English, the ungenerous duke now addressed the prisoners in a style at once savage and insulting, offering freedom to any one of them who, in an encounter with the broad-sword, could foil the trooper. The words had scarcely fallen from his lips, before my father strode forward and claimed the combat.

"'Strike well, Cameron, for the honour of the Highlands!' said Campbell, as my father flung aside his fetters as he would have done a coil of adders.

"'Had you and others of your race struck for the right this day, the Prince would not have been a fugitive in the land of his fathers!' replied the other with an indignant scowl.

"'Oich! you are somewhat insolent for a cock laird or upstart gilly,' said the abashed Campbell. 'But remember that freedom is before you if you conquer; and if not, the hemp is grown—ay, man, and twisted too,—that will hang you like a dog from the walls of Carlisle some day to come.'

"'Better a thousand times to die on the scaffold with the white cockade on my brow, than eat the bread of a foreign oppressor and usurper,' replied my father heedlessly. 'But am I to encounter the *sidier rag* with my hands, after the base manner of his people?'

"'No; take my claymore,' answered Campbell; 'its temper and metal are matchless. Luno of Lochlin never forged a better; and if you are brave as you are impudent, I have no fears for you.'

"'But a dirk; what shall I do for a dirk?'

"'Take mine, Evan of Tor-a-muilt,' said an aged Highlander, stepping forward, wearing red tartans and the bramble-berry badge in his bonnet. He placed a dirk,—this very weapon with which I slew the wolves to-night,—in the hand of my father, who started back with awe at the sight of the giver. The Highlanders around shrunk back likewise. His height was superhuman; his hair was white as snow, and a beard of the same hue descended to the square buckle at his girdle. His eyes had that keen and bright expression in them which seemed to harrow up the soul, and read

the inmost thoughts of those he looked upon. In his bonnet he still wore that badge which all others had discarded for safety,—the white rose of the Stuarts.

"'Strike well, Cameron, and you will have your revenge,' said he, waving his bonnet as he added, 'God bless King James the Eighth, and send death to the Elector of Hanover.'

"'Shoot him! bayonet him! Forward!' cried Cumberland, in a tempest of fury, and with the hoarse accents of rage. 'Blow out the brains of the insolent rebel!'

"But the aged speaker of the treason had disappeared; and although the prisoners were narrowly searched twice over, he could nowhere be found, and the fury of the duke was boundless. What became of the old man, no one knew. He disappeared suddenly from amidst them; but whether he sunk into the earth or melted into thin air, remains yet a mystery; but the Highlanders were filled with terrors, and every man drew his plaid closer around him, and shrunk from the touch of his neighbour. After threatening the English trooper with the lash and triangles if he did not vanquish his opponent, he commanded the combat to begin without further delay. The dragoon cast aside his leather gloves, and drawing his long blade, stood upon the defensive. My father belted his plaid tighter about him, drew his bonnet over his brow, and rushed, in the northern fashion, headlong on his adversary, who was compelled to retire backwards, acting only on the defensive. Burning with hatred and fury, my father pressed forward, headless of the weapon of the soldier, in whose broad breast he buried the dirk of the mysterious Highlander, and then gathering all his force for one mighty effort with the claymore, he clove the unfortunate dragoon down to the neck, cutting even the folds of his white cravat.

"'Well done, Cameron! Heigh! for Lochiel!' cried Colonel Campbell. 'Now your highness will perceive what thews and sinews the mountains can produce. I have gained my bet. Your countryman, the major, is likely to continue one a little longer, and the crown-piece will go to my good champion.'

"'King George has lost a true man,' replied the duke, fiercely, 'and hell is cheated of a Scots rebel for a short time longer. Well now, dog of a Highlander! you have missed the gallows this time; but I believe only a little time will elapse before you dance yet to the hangman's hornpipe.'

"At this supposed smart remark, a loud laugh arose among his glittering staff, and was echoed by the soldiery; but a prouder and more triumphant shout burst from the unfortunate Gaelic prisoners. Many a gallant battle-cry mingled with it. *Fraoch-eilan! A dh'aindeoin cotheireadh! Craigellachie!* from the men of Glengarry, Clanronald, and Strathspey. Loud and long they shouted in defiance, till the crimson cheeks and carbuncles of the corpulent duke turned white with vexation and fury. When the commotion had subsided, Colonel Campbell put a few crown-pieces into my father's hand, and pointed to the hills.

"'Begone now,' said he, 'and thank your mother for giving you such good milk, and for making such a man of you.* Away! the mountains are before you, and you are once more a free man.'

"'I want not your gold or your silver, sir!' said my father, tossing the pieces on the bloody grass. 'Your money is the wages of treason to Scotland, and rebellion against King James. I heed not your frown, sir. God will now be the best judge between your cause and ours, after this fatal day. Keep your money, and I will, with your permission, retain the claymore; it may yet be drawn for King James the Eighth.'

* These were the very words used by Colonel Campbell when this singular combat terminated, after the field of Culloden. See any History of the Civil War, 1745-6.

"And without vailing his bonnet, or deigning to bestow a glance on Cumberland, he broke through the ranks of Wolfe's regiment, and made off with all speed towards the mountains of the Grants' country, where he hoped to remain in safe hiding until the clans gathered together once more, or the present danger had passed away. After concealing himself in the *Chlachdhian*, or sheltering cave of Cairn-gorm, and after wandering for days in Duthil and Inverallan, and being sorely hunted and pressed by the parties of red-coats scouring and devastating the country, he found himself one night compelled to take refuge in the great fir-forests of Grant of Rothiemurchus, the whole country from Lorn to the mouth of the Spey being infested with bands of the *sidier roy*. Beacons of destruction, by night and by day, blazed on hill and in valley, while the proud halls of long-descended chieftains, and the green huts of their faithful vassals, were given indiscriminately to the flames; and the shrieks of helpless women and children were borne on the breeze, which had so lately swelled with the *piobrachd* and march of the Highlander. It was a sight indeed to make him thirst for vengeance, when nightly he looked forth from the cavern of the blue mountain, to behold the sky red with the fires of the destroyer. But, alas! the neck of the Gael was bending beneath the foot of the stranger, and the power of the proud race who would never bend was then broken.

"To shut out sights and sounds which everywhere announced the downfall of Albyn, my father plunged into the recesses of the wild forest of Rothiemurchus, but his retreat was not unmarked. A party of king's troops,—Hessians, I believe,—clad in yellow uniform, beheld him from a neighbouring eminence, and despatched a party of ten men, to shoot or destroy him in any way they chose,—Cumberland having doomed to death all who wore the garb of the Celtic race. For nearly an hour these Georgian sleuth-hounds followed upon his track with murderous eagerness and precision, firing at intervals whenever he came in sight. Their fire he returned, and shot dead three with his Highland pistol.

"Dashing on, and threading the mazes of the forest with the rapidity and activity of a true mountaineer, he contrived to baffle his pursuers, and reached what he supposed to be the inmost recesses of the wilderness. There, panting and breathless with exhaustion, he flung himself to rest on the green sward, cursing and deploring the hour when a son of the Gael had to flee from the arm of a stranger, and was hunted like a deer on his native hills by the soldiers of one he deemed a German despot and oppressor.

"He rolled himself up in his plaid, and creeping close under the pine branches, lay listening with intense eagerness when the crash of a bramble or the rustle of leaves should announce that the Hessians were on his track. The night was calm and still. Not a heather-bell or blade of grass was stirring, and the pendant branches of the gloomy and gigantic pines hung down perfectly still and motionless. Not a sound was heard throughout all the immensity of the vast forest, save the hoarse murmurs of the foaming Spey, whose waters came hurrying down from the far-off hills of Badenoch, and swept through the recesses of Rothiemurchus on their course to the Moray Frith. There was no moon shining, but the night was clear and cloudless, and at times the red stars were seen twinkling through the dark foliage of the pines.

"As my father (Evan of Tor-a-muilt,* as he was named) lay thus in concealment, he suddenly remembered that he was within the bounds of the place haunted by the terrible spirit of Glenmore and Rothiemurchus,—

* The Wedders-hill, an eminence at the foot of Loch-Archaig, in Kilmallie, Inverness-shire.

the *lham-dearg*, or bloody-hand, who compelled all who crossed his path during his nocturnal rambles to do battle with him, and none were ever known to survive the awful conflict. He would have started up and fled; but remembering that it was equally dangerous to avoid as to seek the company of evil spirits, he resolved to remain where he was, saying over his prayers like a good Catholic, and imploring protection from Saint Colm of the Isles. Yet his blood ran cold with terror, perspiration burst forth from every pore, and he covered his head in his plaid to shut out any frightful sight or sound that might invade the stillness of the gloomy wood. He locked his hand in the basket-hilt of his claymore, and lay hearkening so intensely, that he might almost have heard the dew dropping from the leaves.

"A loud exclamation in a barbarous language, and one unknown to him, caused him to start up; and the report of musketry, the crash of shot striking the trees, and the light uniform of a score of Hessians appearing at a short distance, compelled the hunted Highlander again to seek safety in flight. As unrelentingly as ever they pursued, incited by the hope of plunder, and the reward given for every dirk and claymore. The soldiers, to procure Highland weapons, committed a thousand outrages, even in the town of Inverness, and among the mountains tortured by various means the poor peasantry to reveal where their arms were concealed; after which they were either shot or bayoneted.

"'May the curse of Glencoe be upon ye! and may the raven's croak be your only coronach, ye wolves' whelps!' cried he, as he again fled through the wood. 'Better face a Highland bogle than the bayonets of the Hessians, a race as cowardly as they are merciless!'

"He sought the most difficult and devious paths, and soon the shouts of the enemy died away behind him in the distance. No sooner did he find himself in safety than his former fears returned, and as he paced slowly along a narrow forest-path, where the branches were locked together overhead, and where only the pale starlight glimmered at times, he beheld before him the figure of a gigantic Highlander. He was moving but a few yards in front, and his form towered up between the trees in dark and shadowy outline. The belted plaid fluttered behind him, and the eagle's wing, with the forbidden badge of James VIII., adorned his bonnet. With long and stately, but noiseless strides, he continued moving before my father, who often hallooed aloud to him to turn or stand, without receiving an answer. The checks of his tartan were red, his white beard streamed about him, and my father at once recognised by it the aged warrior who had presented him with the dirk on the muir of Drummossie.

"'Turn and assist me, if you are a true son of the hills? The bloodhounds of the Hanoverian have been on my skirts the live-long night; and even now they track me like a stricken deer.' My father received no answer to many such exhortations, yet he continued closely to follow the stranger, who always contrived to elude his grasp, and led him a wearisome ramble across the ravines and deep corries, through brawling torrents and intricate dingles, until, enraged at his contemptuous and singular conduct, he drew his claymore.

"'Turn, base coward!' he exclaimed, 'turn; and I will try whether the boss of your target is proof against the strokes of claymore and skene-dhu, or the *biodag*. Turn, turn; or by my father's bones, I will smite you through the back!'

"Even while he spoke, the form which had glided so far before him suddenly vanished, and he found himself at the mouth of a cavern, huge, black, and yawning, with the long and dark whins waving gloomily from the rocks around. A moment he recoiled at the sight of it, but summoning up his

energies he entered boldly, calling aloud on his midnight companion in terms of threat and defiance, until the winding recesses of the cavern rung with the sound.

"It seemed to him that other noises mingled with the deep echoes of his voice. A tempest of wind tore through the cavern, hurling him violently to the earth. The trees of the forest without were shaken as if by a tempest; the Spey thundered louder over a neighbouring cascade, and the roar of its falling waters was mingled with the shrieks of the river kelpie. My father sprung up, and instinctively stood upon his guard, but an oppressive feeling of horror took possession of his mind; a cold perspiration bedewed his forehead; his lips were parched and his mouth clammy; he could hear his heart throbbing audibly, while he strained his eyes till they almost started from the sockets, as he endeavoured to pierce the gloom. At that moment he would have faced a whole brigade of red-coats to have been free from that terrible cavern, but he had gone too far to recede, and he gathered courage from despair.

"He heard the clank of steel, and the tread of heavy feet sounded as if afar off, in hollow and vaulted places. Something like the fold of a damp plaid or shroud was waved across his face, and the memory of the *lham-dearg* again rushed terribly and vividly upon his mind.

"Expectation and horror wound him to a pitch of madness: he held aloft his target, and even while his hair bristled under his bonnet, and the marrow of his bones seemed turning to ice, he defied the spirit to battle.

"'Bloody hand of Glenmore! spirit of darkness! spirit of hell! come forth! Here a true man, a Cameron, defies you!'

"While the words were falling from his lips, the awful figure stood before him, arrayed as an ancient warrior of the hills, and a halo of lambent fire playing around his form rendered him terribly distinct amidst the surrounding darkness. My father's brain boiled and whirled while he looked upon him, and his heart grew sick and palsied with fear: he knew that he was in the presence of an infernal spirit. Notwithstanding his terror, he recognised the white-haired warrior from whose hand he had received the dirk, and whom he had followed with taunt and defiance through the wood; but a superhuman courage armed his heart and nerved his hand, and calling aloud on heaven and Saint Colm of Iona to aid him, he rushed forward to the encounter. The face of the spectre was changed from what he had first seen it: it was distorted and terrible with rage, and his eyes glared like stars of fire. My father saw the blade of the *lham-dearg* descending like a flash of lightning, yet he shrank not; he felt it ringing upon his target, but he sunk with the mighty force of the blow, and a whirlwind seemed again to rush through the cavern, and bear him along with it, dashing him senseless to the earth.

"When consciousness returned, the morning sun was shining gaily in the wide blue vault, the dewy pines of Rothiemurchus were glistening in the light, and afar off rose the huge sides of the blue Cairngorm. The eagle was boldly winging away from his eyrie among the shores of Lochavon, and soaring aloft on the balmy air; the mountain Spey was rushing as usual through the corries and chasms of the pine-clad glen, from which the white mists and foam of its course were curling in the bright sun, above the dark fir-trees of the vast Highland forest.

"My father rose; he stretched his stiffened limbs and looked cautiously around him, but neither spectre nor red soldier was in sight. Behind him yawned the arched mouth of the black cavern: he shuddered as he looked upon its gloomy depth, and turning away, plunged into the forest, in hopes that some loyal tenant or forester of the laird of Grant would yield him somewhat to save him from perishing of want."

"Then, Dugald, this terrible encounter turns out to have been only a dream after all," said Stuart.

"Nothing more," remarked Fassifern.

"It was nae dream, sirs," said Dugald, forgetting his Gaelic, and resuming the Lowland dialect, "it was indeed nae dream; and as proof positive, he found his target cloven like a nut-shell by the stroke of the spirit's blade—what nae mortal sword could hae dune; for it was covered wi' four barkened ball-hides, and with three hundred brass studs,—and yet it was cloven in twa, and his arm felt the wecht o' the unco' cloure for mony a day after."

"A very foolish story, Dugald," said the colonel. "But you have forgotten to tell us that your father had emptied a capacious hunting-flask of fiery mountain whisky before he entered the cavern; and probably a fall on the rocks might account for the clovert targe."

"Sir, ye never tried to account for it in that way before," replied the old man indignantly; "bethink ye, when at hame, how ye wadna put your nose outside the door-stane after dark, for fear o' encountering *lham-dearg*. Ye were but a callant then, to be sure; but even now, wi' a' your bravery,—and I ken that, like a' o' your name, you've a lion's heart in the field, on the water ye tremble like an aspen leaf, and a' for fear o' the kelpie. But as for my faither's adventure, ye ken the hail country-side rang, and yet rings, wi' the story."

"Your father, Dugald, was always seeing things such as no other man ever saw, I believe."

"I ken he was farer seen than maist folk; but mair than he hae viewed the fightin' spectre o' Glenmore, but nae man ever cam aff sae easy frae a tulzie wi' him. Four o' Rothiemurchus' gillies ance foucht a battle wi' him near Loch-morlach, and never ane o' them survived the scuds his claymore gied them."

"Well; and the dirk—"

"My faither wore till his dying day,—and I shall wear till mine, in memory of that adventure. It's no different frae other men's,—a sharp blade wi' a buckhorn hilt, ye see; but he micht sink it to the guard in an aiken tree, and it ne'er would bend or break. But, as I said before, my faither was farer seen than ither folk, and he ance had a mair solemn and eerie adventure wi' a wraith,—ay, sirs, *his ain wraith*, than the ane I hae now related.

"He joined me when I was wi' the Prince and Lochiel, biding in concealment amang the wild shores of Loch-Archaig, at Kilmalie. The Prince of Wales lived in our puir hut on the top of Tor-a-muilt, frae whar we had a look-out for mony a mile, and richt gude need there was! The hail country was swarming wi' red-coats and bloodthirsty mercenaries, under the Prince of Hesse. Ochone! ochone-aree! Had you seen the gallant Prince Charles as I saw him then! O sirs! the vera thocht o't maddens me. He had neither shirt, shoe, nor hose on; he had been wandering for six weeks in the Corrie-nan-gaul of Knoydart, barefooted, dressed in an auld tartan coat and *filleadh-beg*, wi' a lang beard hanging frae his chin. He carried a musket, dirk, pistol, and horn; and but for his famished and wae-begane face, lookit mair like some wild reiver o' the tales, than the son o' braid Scotland's king.

"We were a' in the same plight, and ever since the dool-day o' Culloden had lived in caves and forests, like the beasts o' the field. My father found us out in our hiding-place—a feat which baffled the followers of Cumberland, to whom no true Scotsman would betray us,—even although thirty thousand pounds were offered for the prince, dead or alive! My father fell on his knees, and sair he wept to see the son o' his king a wan-

dering outcast and outlaw, amang his ain Highland hills. He tauld us o' his encounter wi' the *lham-dearg*, but the prince laughed heartily, just as he used to do at Holyrood, and wadna believe a word o't. Aweel, sirs, we wandered lang about Archaig and Glenpean, stealing for the prince's support the few sheep which escaped Cumberland's order to destroy every living thing in the country. Mony, mony were the miseries and calamities he suffered until the month of September, when he embarked at Moidart on board o' the *Ballona*, a Nantz ship of thirty-twa guns, broucht for him by the loyal Colonel Warren. Lochiel, Glengarry, Borodale, and a hundred common men, including my faither and mysel, followed them into banishment.

"In France, the prince, wha indeed never, while ae plack rubbit on anither, forgot auld friends, got Lochiel command of one of the regiments composed of Scots and Irish refugees, wha served the French king. As in duty bound, we followed Lochiel, and became soldiers of his battalion, which soon became so famous,—the Royal Scots regiment. We were wi' the army under the Mareschal Saxe, whan the French defeated oor auld enemy the bluidy Duke of Cumberland at Laffeldt, in June, 1747, and compelled the British troops to retire in disorder. Wi' a' the memory o' the past, o' our prince's wrangs, and the awfu' butcherie o' Culloden glowing in their minds, the Royal Scots fought wi' richt gude will against the scarlet ranks o' the British, and unco slaughter we made amang them wi' bayonet and claymore, when they were compelled to flee, and retire in disorder on the toon or village o' Val.

"On the evening o' the battle-day, my father stude on duty as an advanced sentinel frae the French picquets, placed by the Mareschal Saxe in the direction o' Maestricht, where the British army lay. It was just aboot the gloaming, the clouds were gathering in the lift and darkening the flat, level, I may say meeserable landscape; and my faither, puir man, strade sorrowfully to and fro on his lanely post, sighing sairly as he thocht on mony a braw and brave comrade and clansman then lying cauld and stiff on the plain o' Val, and ower wham nae coronach could be sung, or cairn raised in the land o' the stranger. He thocht too o' his humble sheiling at hame, on the Wedders-hill, and compared the view frae it wi' the 'Lawlands o' Holland,' wi' the dull marshy flats, the yellow canals, and slaw-moving barges, the windmills, and smoky toons about Laffeldt. Different indeed was the scenery frae that around the lanely auld thack cottage at hame, where the blue Loch-Archaig rolled to the base o' the dark an' towering mountains, covered wi' the siller birch or black pines to their vera tap.

"Puir man! melancholy and sad he grew, but his surprise was aroused, when he saw a Hieland soldier, wearing a garb the vera counterpart o' his ain, walking slowly, at a few yards' distance, as if likewise on sentry. My faither stoppit to observe him, and the stranger stoppit also; and the outline o' his form was distinctly seen, as he stude wi' his back to the west, whare the sky was a' crimson and gowd wi' the last flush o' the day that had passed awa'. My faither challenged twice aloud, but gat nae response; and his birse beginning to rise, he made a motion as if handling his musket, biting his cartridge, and a' that, ye ken. The stranger did sae likewise, imitating his motions exactly as his shadow on the wa', or reflection in a looking-glass wad hae dune. A queer and eerie sensation passed over my faither on behauldin' this, and a souching cam ower his heart when he bethoucht him that a' wasna richt. Yet boldly he gaed towards the figure, and step to step as he took them, mimicking ilka motion, the ither advanced also, until my faither made an involuntary stop, and it did sae too.

"At that moment a feeling o' awfu' and immeasurable horror entered

the soul o' my faither, when he viewed in the face and figure o' the stranger an exact counterpart o' himsel'—every lineament o' his face, every check in his tartan, were the same—the same his arms and badges. Then did he ken that he beheld his wraith, and that the hour of his departure was at hand.* As the expression o' his face became distorted wi' terror and awe, the features o' the wraith or bogle underwent the same change, and his ain een seemed glaring back upon himsel' wi' affricht. He rushed madly forward wi' his charged bayonet, but the form melted into thin air, and disappeared.

"He tauld his comrades o' the sicht he had seen upon the muir, and every true Gael believed him, and knew that his hours were numbered then, and that his time amang them would be short. Yet his heart never trembled, and he went forth to battle the next day wi' a spirit that never flinched, and a hand that never failed, till the death-shot struck him. Sairly his story was jeered by the Lawland loons and men frae south o' Dunkeld; but next day, at the vera return o' the hour in whilk the wraith appeared, he was shot dead in the attack upon the British post at Mount Saint Peter, when the Mareschal Saxe was endeavouring to drive Cumberland beyond Maestricht. Ochone! mony a brave and leal Scot's heart grew cauld that nicht, sirs,—my faither's amang the lave. I rowed him up in his plaid, and buried him wi' my ain hands, howking his grave at the side o' the road between Saint Peter's and the Scheld. The live-lang nicht I wroucht in piling a cairn aboon him, that the feet o' the stranger micht no tread ower the place o' his repose.

"Now, sirs, that the things I hae tauld unto ye this nicht are true, and a' happened just as I hae described, I firmly believe; and that some men are doomed to behauld strange sights and unwarldly visions, nae body will deny."

"I decidedly do, Dugald," said Cameron; "but your father, Evan of Tor-a-muilt, must have been seeing double when he saw the wraith,—no disparagement to him when I say so, for I have heard that he was as brave a man as ever belted on a broad-sword. But rations of Nantz were more plentiful under the Marshal Saxe than with Lord Wellington's troops, and doubtless Evan Cameron never went on guard without a good allowance."

"Deevil a bit, sir," replied the old man testily. "Ye maun ken there was fechtin' and marchin' enough and to spare, but neither pay nor plunder could be gottin under King Louis. In the year after the battle o' Laffeldt, our chief, the gude and the gallant Lochiel, died o' a broken heart, I'm free to say, for the thocht o' being an exile for life weighed heavy on his soul. Sair I sorrowed for him, and so did a' the Royal Scots regiment, for there wasna ane that wadna hae laid doon his life for Lochiel. After seeing him laid in a foreign grave, I cam awa' cannily hame, to live amang my ain folk by bonnie Loch-Archaig, when the dool and dirdum o' the 'forty-five' was a' passed awa' and blawn ower."

* A species of second sight is believed in by the Highlanders, which is supposed to be a forerunner of death. An apparition haunts them, or appears at times, resembling themselves in every respect. The legendary stories of such appearances are innumerable, indeed, over the whole of Scotland.

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CHAPTER VI.

A BATTLE.

In the long interval of time during which Lord Wellington's army remained cantoned on the Spanish frontier, no hostilities took place saving General Foy's fruitless attack upon Bejar, and the defeat of the French under General Frimont in the vale of Sedano, near Burgos. During the winter, supplies of every kind,—pay in some instances excepted,—arrived from Britain, to refit the army and enable it to take the field, which it did in an efficient state in the month of May, 1813.

During the long residence of the Gordon Highlanders in the valley of Banos, they had become quite domesticated among its inhabitants; and it was a daily occurrence to see them assisting in household matters,—working with the men in the gardens and vineyards, or carrying about in their arms the little children of the patrona on whom they were quartered; and before the battalion departed, the venerable *cura* had wedded, for weal or woe, several of the olive-cheeked maidens of the valley to men who wore the garb of old Gaul.

On the 13th of May the corps marched from Banos, and the entire population of the secluded vale accompanied them to the end of the pass, and watched them until the notes of the war-pipes died away in the wind, and the last bayonet gave a farewell flash in the sun-light as the rear-guard descended the mountains towards the plain of Bejar, where Sir Rowland Hill mustered and reviewed the gathering brigades of his division.

The troops presented a very different appearance now from the way-worn, ragged, and shoeless band which, in the close of the last year, had retired from Burgos. Fresh drafts of hale and plump British recruits had filled up the vacancies caused by wounds, starvation, and disease; and a few months in quarters had restored the survivors to health and strength: the new clothing had completely renovated their appearance, and all were in high spirits, and eager again to behold their old acquaintances, Messieurs the French. Sir Rowland complimented Fassifern on the appearance of his Highlanders, who cocked their plumes more gaily now than ever, as they marched past to "the garb of old Gaul." Truly, new scarlet jackets, Paisley tartan, and bonnets from "skull-cleeding Kilmarnock," had wrought a wonderful change upon their ranks.

Although the Duke of Dalmatia and many battalions of French had been ordered into Germany, Buonaparte's army in Spain still mustered 160,000 strong. King Joseph, at the head of 70,000 men, kept his head-quarters at Madrid; the rest were scattered through the eastern provinces, under Suchet and other commanders. It was determined by the British and Spanish governments to make one grand and determined effort to drive the French across the Pyrenees, on again taking the field against them. An efficient train of pontoons was fitted out to assist in crossing those deep and rapid rivers by which Spain is so much intersected. Everything which would tend to the comfort of troops on service had been provided; and the army in the end of May, as I have before stated, commenced offensive measures against the enemy.

Lord Wellington, with the light division, moved on Salamanca; Sir Thomas Graham crossed the Douro, with orders to move on Braganza, Zamora, and Tras-os-montes, and to form a junction with the allies at Valladolid; while Sir Rowland Hill, from Estremadura, was to march on the same point by Alba de Tormes. By these movements the allies turned

that position on the Douro which the French generals had resolved to defend; and so rapid was their march, that General Villatte, who occupied Salamanca with three thousand men, had barely time to effect a retreat, with the loss of two hundred, and a few pieces of artillery. The able Wellington, after placing the right and centre divisions in cantonments between the Douro and Tormes, joined Sir Thomas Graham, whose troops, after encountering many difficulties in crossing rivers, ravines, and mountains, over which they had to drag their heavy artillery and pontoons, took up a position on the left, in communication with the Spanish army of Galicia under General Castanos.

The French, who were utterly unprepared for these rapid movements, retired precipitately, destroying in their retreat the bridges at Toro and Zamora; and the combined army now directed its march in triumph on Valladolid, one of the finest cities of Old Castile, and one which might be styled a city of convents, as it contains no fewer than seventy,—one of them the palace of Philip IV. Crossing Escueva, the allies continued to press impetuously forward, and the enemy to retire unresistingly before them. Joseph abandoned Madrid, concentrated the French legions around the castle of Burgos, which he blew up on the 13th of June, and with his whole force retired under the cloud of night towards the Ebro, the passage of which his generals made every preparation to defend. But again he and they were signally baffled by the skill, talent, and penetration of Wellington, who moving his troops by the San Andero road, crossed the river near its source at Puente de Arenas and San Martino, a measure which so disconcerted the plans of Joseph and Marshal Jourdan, that they were again compelled to retreat, and the allied army continued its march to Vittoria.

On the 20th of June the second division encamped on the plain of Puebla, near Vittoria. The first brigade was then commanded by the Hon. William Stuart (a brother of the Earl of Galloway), a true and gallant soldier of the old school, whose valuable services received no requital from his country.

The time had now arrived when Joseph was compelled to make a final and determined stand in defence of the crown he had usurped, or behold it torn ingloriously from his brow, and on the very ground where Edward the Black Prince, on the 3rd of April, 1367, totally defeated another intruder on the Spanish soil—Henry the Bastard, and restored Don Pedro to the crown of Castile.* The time was likewise arrived when the legions of France, whose movements since the commencement of the campaign had been a series of retreats, should make a decisive effort to renew their fading laurels, or by being driven disgracefully across the Pyrenees, lose for ever that hard-earned fame which they won under the banners of the great Emperor.

Early on the morning of the 21st of June the allies were in motion; Sir William Stuart's brigade moved in front of the second division, which marched along the high road to Vittoria. The morning was beautiful, the earth was fresh with dew, and the merry larks were soaring aloft over bright yellow fields, which were soon to be drenched with blood. The sky was clear, blue, and cloudless, and the shining current of the Zadorra flowed among thickets and fields of ripe waving corn, which often afforded concealment to the light troops during the action. Violets, cowslips, and a thousand little flowers which flourish so plentifully by the way-sides in Spain, were blooming gaudily in the fresh dew; the brown partridge was whirring about, and ever and anon a fleet rabbit shot past as the troops

* This battle was fought at Navarete, a village on the Zadorra, near Vittoria. *See* the Chronicles of Sir John Froissart.

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moved into the corn-fields, treading and destroying the hopes and support of many a poor husbandman. Afar off, their hues mellowed by the distance, rose the bold and lofty ridges of the Pyrenees and other sierras, the outlines of which appeared distinctly against the pure blue beyond. Save the near tread of feet, or the distant blast of a bugle, no other sounds were borne on the morning wind but the bleating of sheep and goats, or a matin-bell tinkling in some solitary hermitage, calling its superstitious inmates to prayer for the success of the friends of Spain.

To the British it was known that the enemy were in position in front, and every heart beat high, and every fibre was thrilling with excitement, as the columns moved towards the plains in front of the town of Vittoria. Moving in close column of companies, the Highlanders marched through a field of ripened corn, which nearly overtopped the plumes of their bonnets. The other corps of the division followed and then halted for a time, during which the crop, which was all ready for the sickle, was soon trodden to mire. But 'necessity has no law.' The flints were examined, the colours uncased, and the drummers were provided with temporary litters, formed of pikes and blankets, for bearing off the wounded officers.

Fassifern's eyes kindled up with that bright and peculiar expression which they ever had when he became excited.

"Highlanders!" cried he, as the regiment again moved forward, "in a few minutes we shall be engaged with the enemy; but I need not exhort you to do your duty, for in that you have never yet failed. Keep the strictest silence on the march, but you may shout till the mountains ring again when the pipes blow to the charge."

"Fu' surely and brawly we'll set up a skraigh then, lads!" said his equerry, Dugald Mhor, who was the only man who dared to reply. "But it's an unco' thing for Hielandmen to keep their tongues still, whan the bonnie sheen o' steel is glintin' in their een. Troth, lads, we'll gie a roar that will mak' Buonaparte himsel shake in his shoon, if he be within hearin'."

The soldiers began to cheer and laugh, while Dugald waved his bonnet; but the voice of the colonel arrested them.

"Silence, Dugald!" said he to that aged follower, who with his sword drawn stuck close to the flanks of his horse; "silence! You always create some uproar in the ranks by your odd observations. I am ever apprehensive that you will thrust yourself needlessly into danger; and indeed it would relieve me of much anxiety, if you would remain in the rear. You know well, Dugald, how much I would regret it, should anything happen to you during the engagement to-day."

"That depends just upon yoursel, sir: whar ye lead, I will follow," replied the old man, whom the world would not have tempted to separate himself from Cameron, who had often insisted on many occasions that Dugald should not peril himself by coming under fire. These were injunctions which the obstinate old vassal valued not a rush; and so in these good-natured altercations the master was always overcome by the man, who seemed to regard fighting rather as a sport or a pleasant source of excitement, just as one would view a fox or stag hunt.

While Major Campbell was boring Ronad Stuart with a painfully-accurate account of the battle of Alexandria, and the position of the French forces on that memorable occasion, the legions of Joseph Buonaparte appeared in sight. As each regiment quitted the path among the corn-fields, and entered upon the plain before Vittoria, they came in view of the whole battle-array of the enemy, occupying a strong position covering each of the three great roads, which at Vittoria concentrate in the road to Bayonne. The long lines of dark infantry appeared perfectly motionless, but their

burnished arms were shining like silver in the sun; the tri-colours of the legions were fluttering in the breeze, and many of their bands struck up the gay *Cà ira* and *Marseillois* hymn on the approach of the allies.

The right flank of Joseph's army extended northward from Vittoria, across the stream of the Zadorra, and rested on the hills above the villages of Gamarra Mayor and Abechuco, covered there by strong redoubts. Between the right and centre was a thick cork-wood, into which were thrown many corps of infantry, to keep open the line of communication. The right centre rested on a height which commanded the vale of the Zadorra, and which was strengthened by nearly one hundred pieces of artillery. Their left and centre occupied the bold ridges above the village of Subijana de Alava, with a *corps de reserve* posted at Gomecha, and a brigade thrown forward on the lofty and rocky mountains of Puebla, to protect their centre. which might have been outflanked by the main-road where it crosses the Zadorra. Joseph Buonaparte in person commanded the whole, having Marshal Jourdan acting under him as lieutenant-general. The armies were pretty well matched, each mustering from 70,000 to 75,000 men, the French having the advantage in occupying a strong position, which every means had been taken to strengthen.

Each regiment of Hill's division, on its debouching from the Vittoria road, formed line from close column, and advanced in that order towards the enemy. To the latter, the view of the allied army at that hour must have presented a grand and imposing spectacle; so many dense masses moving successively into the plain, and deploying into line by companies obliquely, with all the steadiness and regularity of a review; the bright barrels and bayonets of upwards of 70,000 muskets shining in the rays of the morning sun; the silken standards of many colours—red, buff, white, blue, and yellow—waving over them; the bright scarlet uniforms, relieved by the varied green of the landscape; and then the many warlike sounds increased the effect of the scene. The neighing of cavalry horses, the rôll of tumbrils and gun-carriages, the distant yet distinct word of command, the mingling music of many bands, the trumpets of the horse, the bugles of the riflemen, and the hoarse wailing war-pipe of the Highland regiments, ever and anon swelled upon the breeze, pealing among the heights of Puebla, and dying away among the windings in the vale of Zadorra.

The prospect before them must have been one of no ordinary interest to the martial legions of France. At the moment that the distant bells of the convent of Santa Clara de Alava struck a quarter to ten, the memorable battle of Vittoria began.

"There go the Spaniards—the soldiers of old Murillo!" exclaimed Seaton, as a loud and continued discharge of musketry rang among the ridges of Puebla. The sound caused every heart to bound, for the day was big with the fate of many!

"Murillo and the Condé d'Amarante have attacked the left of the French," said Cameron, watching the operations through his telescope; "but they will be compelled to retire unless succoured, and that promptly, too! The heights are becoming covered with smoke——By heavens! they are giving way."

At that moment an aide-de-camp dashed up to the brigade, with Sir Rowland's order for the 71st regiment to advance, and sustain the attack on the heights, in concert with the light companies of the division, while the Highlanders and 50th regiment were to support them in turn.

"Now then, Stuart!" said Seaton, giving Ronald an unceremonious slap on the shoulder, "see if another gold cross is to be won upon Puebla. We shall be under fire in five minutes,—forward, light bobs! Forward double quick!" Away they went in high spirits to the assistance of old Murillo,

whose troops were already wavering, under the steady fire of the French. The roar of cannon and musketry had now become general along the lines, and was absolutely astounding. War on a great scale is a grand, yet a terrible thing. The whole valley of the Zadorra,—the fortified heights of Gomecha on the enemy's right, those of Puebla on their left, the dark woodlands between, the corn-fields, the hedges, and all the grassy plain below, were enveloped in smoke, streaked with continual flashes of fire. In the villages every hut had become a fortress, loop-holed and barricaded, every wall of cabbage-garden and vineyard a breastwork, for possession of which armed men contested desperately, hand to hand, and point to point.

The Honourable Colonel Cadogan commanded the 71st, and other companies, which moved up the heights to the assistance of the Spaniards on the extreme of the British right. Forming line on the hill-side, they advanced with a determination and impetuosity truly admirable towards the enemy, whose close and deadly fire was thinning their numbers rapidly.

"Now, soldiers! upon them like fury! Forward, charge!" cried Cadogan, dashing spurs into his horse's sides. A loud hurrah was the reply, and simultaneously they pushed forward with the bayonet, and rushing like a torrent through clouds of smoke and sweeping volleys of shot, fell headlong upon the enemy, and all was for a time hewing with the sword and butt, or stabbing with bayonet and pike. A severe and bloody struggle ensued, but the French were driven tumultuously from the heights, after suffering immense loss, and having their commanding officer captured.

Ronald, who was then engaged in a charge for the first time, became bewildered,—almost stunned with the whirl, the din, and the wild uproar around him. The excitement of the soldiers had been raised to the utmost pitch, and they became, as it were, intoxicated with the danger, smoke, noise, blood, and death which surrounded them.

Impetuously they continued to press forward upon the foe with all the fury of uncurbed steeds, and the conflict was renewed, foot to foot, breast to breast, bayonet to bayonet, and with eyes of fire men glared at each other above their crossed weapons. When rushing forward with his company, at the moment they mingled with the enemy, Stuart encountered—or I should rather say, when half-blinded with smoke ran violently against a French officer, a cut from whose sabre he parried with his dirk, while, at the moment, he passed his sword through his shoulder, hurling monsieur to the earth with the force of the thrust. At that instant he was stunned and laid prostrate by a blow on the back part of the head, dealt from behind by the butt-end of a firelock, or truncheon of a pike. Vainly he strove to regain his feet, but reeled senseless on the sod, and the last sounds he heard were the triumphant cheers of the British, drowning the feeble cry of *Vive l'Empereur!* from their antagonists. Almost at the same moment the brave Colonel Cadogan fell from his horse, writhing on the grass with the agony of a mortal wound. A yell burst from his regiment, the Highland Light Infantry, as they beheld him fall; an echoing shout broke from their companions, and redoubling their efforts with the bayonet, after frightful carnage, they obliged the enemy to retire precipitately down the mountains. Their left was thus completely routed and in disorder, and the British flag waved triumphantly on the bloody summits of Puebla.

Encouraged by this good fortune, Sir Rowland Hill ordered his second and third brigades to attack the heights of Subijana de Alava, which were gallantly carried after a severe and stern conflict. King Joseph, alarmed at the loss of these important positions, directed his left wing to fall back for the defence of Vittoria, and Sir Rowland, pressing forward with his usual vigour, followed up this retreating movement.

Cole and Picton attacked their centre, and after a spirited resistance the whole chain of heights was abandoned, and the French army began to retire, but in admirable order, on Vittoria. General Graham dislodged the enemy from the hills above Abechuco, and his countryman General Robertson, without permitting his troops to fire a shot, but solely acting with the bayonet, drove them from Gammarra Mayor after great slaughter, and sustaining during the advance a tremendous fire of cannon and musketry. Towards evening Graham's division was pushed forward across the Zadorra, and ordered to secure the road leading to Bayonne. By that time Lord Wellington's centre had penetrated to Vittoria, and the enemy's right wing had totally given way. All was now lost, and the greatest confusion ensued among the foe. The court equipage of King Joseph, the baggage, the artillery, and the military chest of his army were all captured. Those columns retreating on the road to Bayonne were driven like herds of sheep back upon that which leads to Pampeluna, and then the French army became one vast mob, a disorganized and fugitive rabble. Joseph, owing his safety to the swiftness of his horse, abandoned the wreck of his troops and fled towards Pampeluna, hotly pursued by Captain Wyndham with a squadron of the 10th Hussars. In this great victory the loss of the allied army amounted to 5,000, and that of the French to 6,000 or upwards, and the defeat of the survivors was attended by every accompaniment of disgrace. A thousand prisoners were captured by the allies, and of the two solitary guns, of all his immense train, which Joseph succeeded in taking off, *one* alone reached Pampeluna, the other being taken next day.

Lord Wellington deserves the highest admiration for the excellence of his dispositions and manœuvres during the whole of that brilliant campaign, and most decisive victory. Every arrangement, every movement of the French generals, had been completely baffled and disconcerted by his superior skill and military talents. In four weeks he had driven them from Madrid to Vittoria, turning their strong positions on the Douro and Ebro, and at last compelling Joseph and Jourdan to show fight at a point where their army was utterly destroyed.

The battle had almost been fought and won while Ronald Stuart lay senseless among the heaps of killed and wounded on the hills of Puebla. The French, after being repulsed from the latter, detached a legion, 7,000 strong, to recover them, which movement being perceived by General Stewart, he despatched Fassifern with his Highlanders to the assistance of the troops already there. The regiment moved quickly to the front, and after inconceivable exertions gained the summit by clambering up the steepest part of the mountains, a feat perhaps only to have been performed by Scots or Switzers. They soon reached the spot where the desperate charge had been made. Cadogan lay there drenched in his blood, and the carnage around him showed how fierce had been the conflict.

"Our light company men are lying thick here," said Fassifern, as he looked sternly around him.

"Here is Stuart," exclaimed Bevan. "Poor fellow, this is his last field!" The regiment passed in open column, double-quick, beyond the place where Ronald lay to all appearance, what his brother officers thought him to be, dead. Close by him lay Torriano, a lieutenant of the 71st, severely wounded, but there was no time to look at them. The Highlanders moved onward to the assistance of their friends the 50th and Highland Light Infantry, who were severely handled by the enemy on the other side of the heights. There the carnage was appalling in some parts, where the ranks of friend and foe had fallen across each other in piles. Smoke and bright flashing steel were seen everywhere, and the echoes of the mus-

ketry reverberated among the deep ravines and grassy summits of La Puebla. The overwhelming legion were still advancing; they had outflanked the 71st, and cut off its communication with the 50th; and the superiority of the French numerical force was compelling these brave regiments to waver, when the cheers of their Highland comrades rang among the mountains, as they descended to their assistance. As Cadogan had fallen, the command of the troops devolved on Fassifern, and, acting under his orders, the three battalions compelled the legion to retire in disgrace and disorder.

Three other attacks did they make in succession, and with greater strength, but the attempts were vain. The first brigade were resolved to hold Puebla or perish, and Cameron continually drove them back. As the Highlanders said, "their hearts werna stoot eneuch for sae stey a brae," and the proud Frenchmen were compelled to abandon all hopes of regaining the important position.

Ronald lay long insensible where he fell, and when life returned, the first sounds which saluted his ears were the distant roar of the musketry, and all the confused din of a great battle, which the breeze bore up from the plains to the mountains where he lay. From loss of blood and the stunning effects of the blow, he was long unable to rise or even to speak; but his ear was intensely awake to every sound around him, and he eagerly longed to know how the tide of battle was turning in the valley below. The aching and smarting pain in his head was excessive. He placed his hand behind, and withdrew it covered with blood, and closing his eyes, again sunk backwards on the gory turf. Although his ears were invaded by the distressing cries and hoarse groans of agony from the wounded around him, his heart wandered to that Highland home where his very soul seemed to be garnered up; and in that terrible moment he would have given the universe, were it his, for a single glance at the heather hills and the wild woods around the old grey tower of Lochisla. He thought of his white-haired sire, and of what would be his sufferings and feelings should his only son perish in the land of the stranger. Alice, too,—but the thought of her inspired him with new life and spirit. He rose and unclasped her miniature, which was clotted and covered with his blood: he restored it to his breast, and looked about him. As the noise of the battle still continued without abatement, and he heard the shouts and battle-cry of the French mingled with the cheers of the British at times, he asked a French soldier who sat near him, shot through the leg, if he knew how the day had gone. He answered, without a moment's hesitation, that the troops of the great Emperor had outflanked, beaten, and cut to pieces those of Wellington, who was on the road to Lisbon, flying as fast as his horse could carry him. Although Ronald put little dependance on this information, he resolved to satisfy himself. The Frenchman kindly bound up his head, and gave him a little brandy from his canteen; for which the Scotsman gave him his earnest thanks, being quite unable to yield more solid remuneration, not having seen a day's pay for six months. Making use of his sword as a support, he got upon his feet, and all things seemed to swim around him as he staggered forward.

Cadogan had been carried off by two soldiers of his own regiment, but his horse was lying dead upon a wounded Highlander, who had long struggled to free himself from its oppressive weight, and now called aloud to Ronald, who was unable to yield him the slightest assistance. As he passed slowly onwards to that part of the heights whence he expected to have a view of the whole battle-field, he beheld the officer whom he had encountered lying dead, pierced with a score of bayonet wounds. A soldier of the light company lay dead across him, with his face literally dashed

to pieces by a blow from the butt-end of a musket, and so much was he disfigured that it was impossible to recognize him. Close by a piper of the 71st lay dead, with his pipe under his arm; his blood had formed a black pool around him of more than a yard square. Hundreds were lying everywhere in the same condition; but further details would only prove tiresome or revolting.

With much difficulty Stuart gained the extremity of the ridge, and the whole soul-stirring display of the field of Vittoria burst at once upon his gaze, extending over a space of ground fully six miles in length. Truly, thicker than leaves in autumn, the bodies of men were strewed along the whole length of the hostile armies. The warm light of the setting sun was beaming on the mountain tops, but its lustre had long since faded on the sylvan vale of the Zadorra, where the shadows of evening were setting on the pale faces of the dead and the dying. The plains of Vittoria, too, were growing dark, but at the first view Ronald was enabled to perceive, and his heart beat proudly while he did so, that the allies had conquered, and the boastful story of the Gaul was false.

Afar off he beheld dense clouds of dust rolling along the roads which led to Pampeluna and Bayonne. There the glistening arms were flashing in the light of the western sky, as the brigades of British cavalry swept on like whirlwinds, charging and driving before them, *sabre à la main*, the confused masses of French infantry, who, when their position was abandoned, retired hurriedly towards the main roads for France. He saw his own division far down the plain, driving a column like a herd of sheep along the banks of the river towards Vittoria; beyond which they pursued them, until the smoke of the conflict, and the dust which marked its route, were hidden by the cloud of night.

But long before this he had begun to descend the hills, and weak and wearied as he was, he found it no easy task to scramble among the furze, briers, and brambles with which their sides were covered. At the foot of them he found many men of his own regiment lying dead. These had been slain by the fire of a few field-pieces, which the French had brought to bear upon them while moving towards Puebla. The moon broke forth when he reached the banks of the Zadorra, which he forded, the water rising up to his waist. This drenching added greatly to his misery, as the night was cold and chilly; but he walked onward as rapidly as he could, with the hope of reaching Subijana de Alava, Vittoria, or any place where he might hope to get his wound dressed, after which he trusted that he should be able to rejoin the regiment without delay. But losing his way, he wandered across the field, where the bodies of men and horses, dead or yet rolling about, broken waggons, dismounted or abandoned cannon, encumbered him at every step.

No shrieks now saluted his ears as he passed over the plain; but groans —deep and harrowing groans of agony, and half-muttered cries for water, or pious ejaculations, were heard on every side, while the ghastly and distorted faces, the glazed and upturned eyes, the black and bloody wounds of the dead appeared horrible, as the pale light of the moon fell on them. The vast field, although so many thousand men lay prostrate upon it, was, comparatively speaking, still; and to Ronald there seemed something sad and awful in the silence which succeeded the ear-deafening roar of the battle which had rung there the live-long day. Many a strong hand was stretched there powerless, and many a gallant heart, which had beat high with hope and bravery in the morning, lay there cold enough at night.

Little think the good folk at home,—those who for days would be haunted by the memory of some sudden death, which possibly they had witnessed in the streets,—little do these good people imagine, or perhaps

care, for the mighty amount of misery accumulated on a single battle-field, and the woe it may carry into many a happy home and domestic circle. But the agony of dying men, and the tears of women, are alike forgotten and unheeded when forts fire, cities illuminate, balls are given, and mails sweep along, decorated with flags and laurels, in honour of a victory. . .

Eager to leave the field behind him, Stuart hurried forward as well as he was able, until, stumbling over a dead cavalry horse, he fell violently to the earth, and his wound bursting out afresh, the light faded from his eyes, and he lay in a sort of stupor across the corse of a French soldier, in whose breast a twelve-pound shot was buried. While lying there, he became tortured with an intense thirst, which he found it impossible to alleviate, until a drizzling rain began to descend, and after exercising his patience, he caught enough in the hollow of his hand to moisten his parched lips.

The sound of voices close by recalled him to himself fully, and he found that he was in imminent danger. A file of Portuguese soldiers approached, bearing a lantern to assist them in effectually plundering the dead. The knapsacks of soldiers were ripped open, and the contents carefully scanned; and the epaulets, lace, stars, &c. were torn away from the uniforms of the officers. Stuart's blood boiled up within him to behold brother soldiers, men in arms, engaged in an occupation so truly despicable; but well aware of the danger incurred by encountering or threatening people so unscrupulous as death-hunters,* he only grasped the hilt of his dirk, and lay perfectly still until they had passed by, which they luckily did without observing him.

Scarcely were they gone, when another wretch appeared, bent on the same disgraceful errand. He was either a robber or guerilla, and carried on the hollow of his left arm a musket, from which dangled a long leather sling. A pewter crucifix glittered on the band of his broad-leaved hat, and the polished brass hilts of the double daggers and pistols in his sash gleamed in the light of the moon, which at that moment shone forth with peculiar brilliancy. A new pair of large epaulets, which Stuart had put on a few days before, attracted this worthy's attention, and he came straight towards the wearer to possess himself of them.

What were the feelings of the young Highlander to behold in the robber the abhorred Narvaez Cifuentes, the destroyer of the noble and beautiful Catalina! An electric shock seemed to pass over every fibre, and again his heart beat violently. He grasped tighter the thistle-hilt of his short weapon, and watched with an eagle eye the motions of the robber. Narvaez knew him the moment their eyes met, and uttering a short but emphatic oath, he sprung forward and leaped upon Ronald with his whole weight, and pressing a knee upon each arm, perfectly incapacitated him from making any defence, especially in his weak and wounded state.

"How now, my gay *senor soldado!*" said Narvaez with a chuckling laugh, after they had glared at each other in silence for a few seconds. "Methinks we have met at last, under circumstances somewhat disadvantageous to your safety."

Ronald's only reply was a frantic attempt to free himself from the iron grasp of the other.

"Be still,—*carajo!*" said the ruffian as he unsheathed a poniard; "be still, or I may mercifully give a deep stroke at once, without having the little conversation I wish to enjoy with you, before you die."

"Dog of a robber!—dog of a Spaniard!" gasped Ronald in a hoarse accent. "Free but my right hand, and, weak and exhausted as I am, I will meet you—"

* Death-hunters,—a name given by soldiers to those who follow armies to strip the dead after a battle.

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"Ho, *Demonios!* a rare request! *Par Diez!* no, no, *mi amigo.* I will have these bright epaulets (which I beg you will not spoil by struggling so), and I will have this golden cross and other things, without either the risk or trouble of trying points with you. Hah! have you forgotten the night when we first met at Albuquerque? By our Lady of Majorga, you shall this night know that I have not! We have many odd scores to pay off, and they may as well be settled here on the field of Vittoria, as elsewhere. Besides, Senor Valour, when your corpse is found, you will be mentioned among the killed in the *Gaceta de la Regencia.* Hah! hah!"

"Wretch! you forget that this day my blood has been shed for Spain and Ferdinand VII.!"

"You have been paid for that, I suppose," replied the fellow, accompanying his observation, which might have suited a British Radical, with an insulting laugh, while Stuart panted with rage.

"Now, then,—what would you do were you released by me?"

"Stab you to the heart!"

The robber laughed.

"*Cuidado* was ever my motto," said he; "a dead man tells no tales."

Grasping and compressing Ronald's throat with his left hand, he flourished aloft his right, which held his stiletto, a sharp short dagger, with a round blade like that instrument known as a butcher's steel. "Now, *valiente senor*, compound for death, and not for life. I may prolong your tortures, giving a hundred stabs instead of one; but your dying moment shall be easy, if the lining of your pockets is tolerable. A stab for every *duro!* hah! hah!"

That instinctive feeling which causes every man to struggle to the utmost to preserve life, arose powerfully in the breast of Ronald Stuart at that instant, when he saw the deadly blade of the ruthless assassin gleaming above him in the moonlight. He felt that his last moment was come, and yet he resolved not to die without another gallant struggle. Exerting every energy—straining every muscle and fibre, by one desperate effort he hurled the robber violently backwards; but before he could rise, his merciless assailant again sprung upon him with renewed ferocity, and striking blindly with his stiletto, buried it twice in the turf close by Ronald's ear. There can be little doubt that this new attack would have terminated fatally for him, had not two officers, muffled to the eyes in their cloaks, ridden hastily up, upon which the robber, without attempting to strike another blow, snatched up his rifle and fled,—but not unscathed.

"A death-hunter! He shall die, by heavens!" exclaimed one of the strangers, snatching a pistol from his holsters and firing after Cifuentes, who was seen bounding with the speed of a greyhound over the encumbered field, and the moon shone full upon him. A sharp howl of pain followed the report of the shot.

"Your shot has told, my lord," said the other officer. "These rascals deserve no mercy."

"The fellow is leaping along yet. I would again fire, but for the waste of powder."

"He was struggling with some one here."

"Your arrival has been very fortunate," said Ronald, in a voice which faltered from weariness and excitement. "I have had a protracted and desperate struggle with the ruffian, and must have perished under his hands at last, as I am weak with loss of blood, and totally incapable of defending myself."

"Put this to your mouth," said the first speaker, "and take a hearty pull. 'Tis cold whisky-toddy,—a beverage not often got so near the Pyrenees."

"Thanks, sir!" said Ronald, as he put the flask to his lips, and drank gratefully of the contents. "So we have gained the day."

"Gloriously!" replied the other. "But where are you wounded?"

"On the head,—by a blow from a musket-butt, or shaft of a pike. I received it on the heights of Puebla."

"Ah, there was sharp work there, when the battle began this morning. So you belong to the fighting division—Sir Rowland's? You have wandered a long way from the heights."

"I was endeavouring to rejoin my regiment," replied Ronald, staggering up, and propping himself with his sword; "I was loath to be absent while I could lift a limb. But to whom am I indebted for my safety? You are both countrymen, I believe, by your voices."

"You are right," replied the officer who wounded Cifuentes. "This is Captain Ramsay of the 18th Hussars,—Ramsay of the Dyke-neuk-heid, as we call him at home; and I am Lord Dalhousie. We are riding to join the seventh division."

"I was not aware to whom I had the honour of addressing myself," said Ronald. "I shall be obliged by your lordship informing me where my own regiment now is."

"The Gordon Highlanders, I presume?"

"Exactly, my lord,—in Stuart's, late Howard's brigade."

"A brave regiment, and my heart warmed at the sight of their tartans to-day. They are a long way from this, pursuing the French along the Pampeluna road, and are probably as far as Salvatierra by this time."

"Then I can never reach them to-night," said Stuart dejectedly.

"Here are some of the Waggon-train," said the earl. "To their care we must consign you and be off forthwith, as all the troops are pressing forward *en route* for the Pyrenees."

As Dalhousie and his aide-de-camp rode off, the noise of wheels and cracking of whips announced the arrival of some of the Royal Waggon-train. One of the cars was advancing straight towards him, but slowly, as its course was continually impeded by the dead and wounded lying across its way. An officer of the train, with an immense plume in his cocked-hat, and wearing the rich uniform of this easy branch of the service, rode beside the waggon, into which they were putting those wounded men whose cries attracted their attention.

"The heights of Puebla?" said the waggon-officer, in a tone of surprise and expostulation to another who rode beside him. "Oh! it is quite impossible to detach any of my party so far."

"How, sir! so far?" replied the other angrily, in the voice of Major Campbell. "And is a brave lad to bleed to death and have his bones picked by the corbies, because a loon like you is afraid to climb a hill? By the Lord! he shall not perish through the neglect of one like you, whose whole share of a battle is seeing the smoke and hearing the noise at a comfortable distance, and then coming in with these infernal rattle-traps to pick up the wounded when the danger is all over."

He of the waggons was too much enraged to reply readily; and before he could speak, Ronald heard the voices of Macdonald and Evan Iverach.

"Come, major, don't quarrel about it. I am afraid that it will be a fruitless errand seeking Stuart among the heights. Poor fellow! I am too sure he was quite dead when we passed him this morning."

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald, dinna say sae!" groaned Evan, who had been lamenting as they came along, "dinna say sae! I have had an awfu' day o' wae and anxiety upon his account. There he is—God preserve me in my senses! No, my een dinna deceive me,—there he is!" cried Evan in a voice rising into a scream nearly, while he rushed forward as Stuart's

figure, moving slowly towards them, met his view. Evan, as usual, began to caper and dance, blubber and weep with joy, while Campbell and Alister warmly shook the hand of his master.

"Ha, Stuart, my lad! I knew you were hard to kill," said Campbell; "and so, in spite of Alister's assertions that you were gone 'to the land of the leal,' I determined to set out in search of you as soon as the regiment halted. Old Ludovick Lisle of ours would have been buried alive, once upon a time, in Egypt, but for my interference. He had been struck down by an iron mace in some brawl with a loon of a Mameluke, and I knew that he was only stunned; so I poured a glass of brandy down his throat, and brandy never failed to bring old Ludovick to, whatever was the matter."

Ronald objected to entering the waggon, which was already crowded, and the bottom of it was covered with blood: so it moved off, the officer telling Campbell he should hear from him in the morning. The major replied that he should be very happy, and dismounting, gave his horse to Stuart; who, as they moved along, gave a report of his encounter with Cifuentes, and interview with Lord Dalhousie.

"He is a brave man and a good officer," said Campbell. "And as for Ramsay, of the Dyke-nuek-heid, he is, though a Lowlander, one of the finest fellows I ever met, and the best mixer of Athol brose and whiskey-punch in the three kingdoms. But we must move forward as fast as possible. Spur up this nag, Stuart; he was a French dragoon-horse this morning, but has changed masters. My poor Rosinante, on which you ran such a rig at Almarez, was shot under me as we ascended the heights. Cameron, likewise, had his horse killed under him; and, to make the matter worse, had another killed over him, by which he was confoundedly bruised."

"But I see, major, that your left arm is in a sling."

"I received a scratch from the sabre of a French sub, who assailed me before I could draw Andrea; but I knocked him down with my stick, disarmed, and took him prisoner."

"Well, Alister, I rejoice to see you have escaped this time; and Evan, my trusty fellow, too."

"A' sound and haill, sir; but I had a narrow escape frae a sharp-shooter birkie, wha put three shot through my bonnet just before the regiment cam' rattling doon the brae to our assistance."

"And how have the corps fared throughout this eventful day?"

"Easily, indeed," replied Macdonald, "considering how our friends the 71st and the 50th have been cut up."

"Where is the regiment?"

"Bivouacked a few miles in front of Vittoria. None of the officers are killed, but some are wounded,—Cameron by the fall of his horse, which was killed by a twelve-pound shot, and Seaton had his left arm shot through; but the moment it was dressed he rejoined, and is probably now with his 'light bobs.' At the foot of the hills, we lost a serjeant and many men by the fire of the enemy's cannon, but—"

"But we had our vengeance to the full," cried Campbell, brandishing his stick. "They have lost as much as was ever tint at Shirra-muir. Forgetting the crown of Spain, only think, Stuart, my man,—one hundred and fifty splendid pieces of ordnance, four hundred caissons laden with Lord knows what, the plunder of all Spain, perhaps! some millions of musket-cartridges, the baggage of the army, the military-chest, colours and drums innumerable, and the bâton of Jourdan, which he dropped in his hurry or fright. But the military-chest, by Jove! had you seen how free the 18th

Hussars made with it,—every rascal of them stuffing his boots to the brim with gold Napoleons! There will be a devil of a row kicked up about it at the Horse-Guards, you may be sure of that. We have captured I know not how many carriages, every one full of the ladies of Joseph's court: rare work we have had with them! Alister, with twenty men, gallantly stormed one vehicle at the point of the bayonet, and seized four terrified young ladies—one of whom, I believe, is the Countess de Gazan, wife of the general of the same name."

"How horrified the poor creatures were!" said Macdonald. "One train of court-carriages, in flying away at full gallop to escape Graham's division, which had intercepted their flight to Bayonne, came among us, and were, of course, compelled to halt. But they were treated with all due gallantry and honour."

"Especially by Blacier's riflemen, who dragged some ladies out without ceremony, and rummaged them over like so many custom-house officers; and with their bayonets tore and ripped up the rich silk lining of the carriages, in hopes of finding concealed jewellery."

"Germans are more proverbial for their greed, than for devotion to the gentler sex. But Lord Wellington has despatched the ladies away to the rear, among the prisoners taken in the battle."

"A knowing chield!" said the major. "Some of these French girls are pretty enough to turn the hearts and heads of their captors. Arthur knew that, and thought them safer *en route* for Belem, than in the midst of his army. By my word! 'tis a devil of a thing to hear a sweet young girl, with bright black eyes, cherry lips, &c. &c., imploring you in most dulcet French to spare her life, and all that. What the deuce! Some of these fair creatures to-day seemed to think they had got among an army of ghoules or ogres, instead of honest British soldiers."

"I forgive their terror," answered Ronald. "Only imagine what would be the feelings of British ladies, falling, as these did, into the hands of a foreign army, flushed and fierce with the excitement of such a battle, the blood and glory of such a victory!"

On entering the town of Vittoria, they found it filled with French and British wounded; and the numbers were increasing, as the waggons went to and fro between the field and town, which soon became converted into an hospital. Cries, groans, and thrilling exclamations of suffering, rang from every house; and men were lying in ranks below the piazzas of the market-place, waiting till their wounds could be looked to; and in every street lay scores of weary and maimed soldiers, who, unable to proceed further, had sunk down bleeding and expiring, helpless as babes, without a hand to close their eyes.

Stuart's wound was of too little importance to procure immediate attendance, all the surgeons being hard at work, with their shirt sleeves turned up, hewing off legs and arms mercilessly, as was their will and pleasure in those days. On with the tourniquet, and off with the limb, was the mode then; any attempt to reduce a fracture being considered a waste of time, and a style of cure troublesome alike to patient and physician. After searching about for some time to find a son of Esculapius unemployed, but without success, they adjourned to a *café* immediately within the Santa Clara gate.

The large drinking-room was crowded with officers, some of whom had got their scars dressed, and, in defiance of the orders of *el medico*, were quaffing horn after horn of the country wine, in honour of the victory. Seaton, with his arm slung, was thus employed in one corner with an officer of the 50th, whose head was wrapped in a bloody handkerchief.

Many others were in the same trim; and the conversation consisted of loud and boisterous observations and criticisms on this and that movement —the advance of one division, the retreat of another—promotion, brevet, thanks of parliament, a medal,—and so on; and all were lavish in their animadversions on the 18th Hussars, for making so free with the military chest. Their observations were often mingled with loud and reckless military merriment, and an occasional hearty malediction on some wound which would not cease bleeding, or an exclamation of pain at the twinges it gave. Many Spanish officers were sitting over chess-tables, absorbed in their favourite national game, forgetting altogether, in the interest which it excited, the battle so recently gained, and which was of so much importance to the liberties of their country. But it has been truly remarked by some one, that, give the Spaniard his cigar, his sunshine, his *querido*, and amusements, and it is all one to him whether Spain is ruled by a Solon or a Caligula.

In another corner of the drinking-room, a Spanish colonel was sitting coolly with a napkin and brass basin under his chin, undergoing the operation of being shaved by the senior surgeon of his regiment, as it is, or was, the duty of that officer to take off the colonel's beard every morning, or whenever required. So much for the dignity of the medical profession in Spain.

Enveloped in a cloud of tobacco-smoke, which left no part of him visible but his twinkling grey eyes and red snub nose, Captain Blacier occupied the opposite corner, busy in preparing a luxurious German dish, the ingredients for which he produced from the havresack of glazed canvas which he carried with his blanket on his back. A large tin trencher stood before him, and into it he was shredding a cabbage, which he had picked up when skirmishing in the neighbourhood of Salvatierra the preceding day; and after sprinkling over it pepper, salt, vinegar, and garlic, he began to eat with infinite relish.

After getting his wound dressed by the Spanish *medico*, and after drinking a few horns of *agua y vino*, Ronald procured a light forage-cap in place of his heavy plumed bonnet, and accompanied by Seaton and those who found him on the field, he set out for the regiment, which, with Hill's whole division, lay bivouacked six miles in front of Vittoria, where, after pursuing the French till past midnight, they had halted.

On being accommodated with a horse, Ronald was enabled to accompany the troops, which moved next day to drive the enemy across the Pyrenees. Acting with his usual promptitude, Wellington pushed onward with the third, fourth, and light divisions to Pampeluna, whence the ex-king Joseph, with the greater part of his shattered host, retired into France by the famous pass of Roncesvalles; while the rest, under the command of General Gazan, retired by the vale of El Bastan.

Lord Wellington surrounded Pampeluna, which was yet held by a French garrison; and Graham, who with the left wing of the allies had pursued the retreating enemy on the great road for France, came up with a corps near Tolosa, which he attacked and defeated, and driving them across the Bidassoa, boldly invested the strong fortress of San Sebastian, from the towers of which yet waved the tri-colour and the standard of King Joseph.

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CHAPTER VII.

AN OUT-PICQUET ADVENTURE.

To prevent the French from possessing themselves of the Maya heights, Wellington directed the Earl of Dalhousie, with his division, to threaten them by moving on San Estevan; while Sir Rowland Hill, with the first and three others of his brigades, made a similar demonstration, by marching through the wild and romantic pass of Lanz.

Along the whole line of march from Vittoria to the Pyrenees, a distance of about one hundred miles, the roads were strewed with dead or abandoned horses, broken waggons, dilapidated carriages, military *caissons*, and clothing of every kind; uniforms of officers, rich dresses, laces, veils, and gloves of ladies, which were torn forth from mails and imperials by the rude hands of guerillas and caçadores, and scattered about everywhere; thousands of French commissariat returns, bundles of bank-notes, and packets of letters, written to many who then lay cold beneath the turf at Vittoria, were scattered over the ground by which the French had retired. Many poor stragglers, disabled by wounds or starvation, fell into the hands of the conquerors, and with others many ladies of Joseph's court, who on escaping, when the carriages were taken by Graham's division, had attempted to make their way to the Pyrenees by passing through wild and unfrequented places. Many of these unfortunate creatures fell into the power of the Spaniards, and were treated in a manner too barbarous to relate; and others were seen by the gentler British, fainting, expiring, or dead by the way-side, bare-footed, almost naked, and reduced to the most pitiable condition. All who were found alive were sent under an escort to the rear, to be placed among the other prisoners.

The great chain of the Pyrenees was now before the victors, and on the 3rd of July, Hill, with his four brigades, began to ascend the heights. After a harassing march through that deep gorge among the mountains which takes its name from the town of Lanz, they came in view of the out-picquets of General Gazan's corps, and arrangements were made to drive them in forthwith. Led by Fassifern, the first brigade moved through the most solitary passes of the mountains by a village named Almandos, and took up a position on the left of Gazan's out-posts, upon which Sir Rowland gave orders to attack them in front. On finding that Cameron had turned their flank so effectually, they retired, firing by the way, and reached their main body at Barreta, where a sharp skirmish took place, in which the Condé d'Amarante's Portuguese suffered considerably.

Next day, Gazan retired precipitately through Elizondo, followed by the Portuguese, who were eager to revenge the slaughter of their comrades in the preceding day's skirmish, and the troops resumed their march towards the heights of Maya.

"Cheerily now, Highlandmen!" cried Campbell, flourishing his cudgel, as he spurred his horse past the heavily accoutred sections, who were toiling up the mountains; "hold cheerily on, my lads! Set a stout heart to a stey brae,—ye mind the old saying at home: ye'll soon see the high road to Britain, the way we must all go, ere we see the curl of our ain peat-reek."

A few hours' march brought them to the summits of the Pyrenees, and afar off was seen the ocean, which they had not beheld for so long. It was the way to their homes, and from a simultaneous feeling, which inspired man, three hearty cheers awoke the echoes of the mountains; caps

and bonnets were tossed into the air,—the bands struck up "Rule Britannia," and the pipers blew till their faces grew purple and black. The brigades halted for a few minutes, and a dead silence succeeded the first outbreak of their joy. Every man's breast seemed swelling with emotions, which he found it impossible to communicate; but he read in the faces of his comrades the same joy which quickened the pulses of his own heart. The sea,—the same deep-heaving sea which swept around the rocks and shores of their own country, now spread its broad bosom before them; and long and wistfully they gazed on the white sails of the solitary British cruisers, which here and there dotted the dark-blue waters of the Bay of Biscay. The green ridges of the Lower Pyrenees, the fertile plains and wooded vales of France, lay spread at their feet like a brightly-tinted map. Saint Jean de Luz, the famous and opulent Bayonne, and a thousand minor towns and villages, were seen from those lofty summits, now trod by British soldiers for the first time. Behind them lay sunny Espana, through which they had toiled and fought their way, and where many a comrade had found his grave,—but no man looked to the rear. Every eye was turned to the north,—on France, which lay below them. But stern and bloody work was awaiting them, and many a one whose heart then bounded with thoughts of his native home, and with a thousand inexpressible hopes, wishes, and fond anticipations, was doomed to find his last resting-place on these very heights of Maya.

That night the troops bivouacked on the mountain-side, a league in front of Elizondo. As it was generally his luck, after any march which had been particularly long and tiresome, Ronald Stuart had command of an advanced picquet, forming one of the chain thrown out in the direction of Gazan's division, which had taken up a position lower down the mountains, with the determination to dispute every inch of ground that led to *la belle France*,—a resolution which the Marquis of Wellington determined to put to the test next day. Stuart's orders were to visit his sentries every hour throughout the night, to keep them on the alert; a duty which proved very harassing after so long a march, as it was almost impossible to sleep in the short intervals between the rounds. However, fretting would not have bettered the affair, and rolling himself up in his cloak, he resolved to make himself as comfortable as he possibly could. A huge fire lighted by the soldiers lessened the cold, and counteracted the effects of a heavy wetting dew, which falls amid these mountains at almost every season.

After his ration of beef had been broiled on the embers, eaten without salt off the end of a ramrod, and washed down with a canteen full of that rich cider, for the production of which the district around Elizondo is so famous, after listening to the merry bells of the town, which were ringing in honour of the British, and after watching, until he grew weary, the varying effects of light and shade, as the red blaze of a dozen picquet fires glared on the beetling crags, deep seams and gorges, or green sides of the hills, he found it almost impossible to resist the invasion of sleep. Even the miniature of his dark-haired Alice failed to enliven him, and he envied the privates of his party, who, having neither command nor responsibility, slept soundly by the fire, with their knapsacks beneath their heads, and their arms piled beside them. On consulting his watch to see how the time went, he found that it was midnight, and that an hour had elapsed since his last visit. As it was necessary to be attended by some one, he awoke Evan,* and desiring him to take his arms, moved towards his sentinels, whom he had considerable trouble in discovering, as the night was intensely dark. All was right, every soldier was on the alert, and Ronald

* An officer's servant is always on duty with his master.

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was returning with his follower through the winding and rocky path towards the fire, which served as a beacon to guide them to their post, and which they beheld glimmering through the gloom some hundred yards off, when a piercing cry rang through the still air, at a short distance from the place where they were.

"Hey, sir!" exclaimed Evan, beginning to unbuckle his pouch; "what can that be, in sic a wild place as this?"

"A woman's voice, I think."

"It cam frae the hill on the left o' the road,—I'm sure o't. Hech! it was an unco' cry."

"Follow me," said his master, beginning quickly to ascend the hill.

"Hech, sir! dinna venture up the bank till we hear something mair," said Evan cautiously, following promptly nevertheless. "My certie! we kenna what folk may bide amang the holmes and howes hereabout. At hame I have heard tell o' sic cries ringing at this time, between the nicht and morning, and they were ay for ill, and never for gude. Sae be advised, sir, and wait a wee."

"Evan!" said Stuart angrily, "are you afraid of men?"

"Ye ken I am no, sir!" replied the Highlandman sharply. "I would scorn to turn heel on sax o' the best that ever trod on heather. Mair would, may be, be venturesome."

"Of bogles, then,—or spunkies, or what?" The soldier was silent.

"Campaigning might have taught you to laugh at such ideas, Evan."

"Gang on, sir," replied the other sturdily; "if old Mahoud, wi' horns, hoof, and blazing een sat on the brae head, I'll follow ye; but auld Dugald, the cornel's man, tauld me an unco' story ca'd the *lham-dearg*, that gars me scunner at my ain shadow after nicht-fa'." Again the cry rang loud and shrilly, and many others followed in succession.

"There is no mistake now," cried Ronald, rushing up the hill towards a light, which was seen twinkling through the darkness. "It is the voice of a woman,—and she cries for help." Scrambling forward, among rocks and stunted trees, a few moments brought them in front of a hut of the rudest and humblest construction. The light shone through the open hole which served for a window, and from this structure the cries, which had now died away, had certainly proceeded. Before he entered, Ronald reconnoitred the interior through the loop-hole. Two shepherds, arrayed in the coarse clothing made of the undyed wool of the mountain sheep, sat smoking cigars and drinking at a rough wooden table, while they coolly surveyed a very singular scene. A young and very handsome woman, a lady evidently by her form and air, although her dress was torn and soiled, her white silk bonnet hanging in fritters, her hair dishevelled, and her feet almost bare, struggling wildly with, and exerting every energy to oppose, the brutality of—whom? Cifuentes! the diabolical Narvaez Cifuentes, who, like a bird of ill omen, seemed doomed to cross the path of Ronald Stuart wherever he went,—and even there, on the borders of France. He appeared the same ferocious dog as ever, with his matted hair and scrub beard; but his aspect was now rendered hideous by a large scar on the cheek and chin, caused probably by the random shot which Lord Dalhousie had bestowed upon him at Vittoria. His musket, sabre, and pistols lay upon the table. His stiletto he held to the white neck of the sinking girl, and swore by every saint in the calendar that he would plunge it in her heart, if she did not cease her cries. Overcome with terror and exhaustion, she sunk upon her knees before him, when Evan, applying his foot to the door, dashed it in, and Stuart rushing forward, grasped Narvaez by the throat, hurled him to the earth, before, in his own defence, he could strike a blow with his weapon, which Evan wrested adroitly from his hand,

and saying, with a grin, that "it wad mak' a brave *skene-dhu* for his faither the piper," stuck it into his right garter. Fiercely did Cifuentes struggle with his athletic assailant, who, although he planted a foot on his throat, delayed, with a mistaken humanity, to bury his claymore in his heart,—a display of mercy Ronald had reason afterwards to repent most bitterly.

The two herds started to their feet on beholding this unexpected conflict, and the lady, in the extremity of her terror, flung her arms around Stuart, and, grasping him convulsively, completely impeded his motions. Of this circumstance his adversary did not fail to take the utmost advantage. After several fruitless efforts, he escaped from Ronald's powerful grasp, and, eluding the bayonet of Evan, who charged him breast-high, rushed from the cottage, and disappeared in the darkness with the speed of a hare.

Ronald's fury was now turned against the villanous shepherds, whom, in the extremity of his anger, he threatened to put to death; upon which they quitted their dwelling, and made a hasty retreat. While Evan stood sentinel at the door, his master endeavoured to calm and pacify the young lady, whom he found to be French—very pretty, and very attractive. No sooner had her terror subsided, than she returned him thanks and praises with such volubility in French and English, that Ronald became almost abashed, and with some reserve inquired her name?

"The Baroness de Clappourknuis."

"Oh, indeed! And how alone in such a place as this?"

"Ah! monsieur, you need scarcely ask. When the royal carriages were captured, on the road to Bayonne, I was one of the few who effected an escape from them. Oh, pity me! *monsieur officier*, and do not deliver me up to be sent a prisoner to England."

"Madame, what would you have me to do?"

"Oh, anything you please,—that is, monsieur, conceal me but for a day or so. General Gazan's troops are not far off, and my husband the baron is with them. I may find means to rejoin him safely. I am sure you will not treat me cruelly—your look is so gentle. But we Frenchwomen have quite a terrible idea of you British soldiers, and my fears have carried me thus far from the fatal plains of Vittoria. Ah! good sir, you may imagine, but I can never describe the terrors, the miseries, the horror I have undergone while wandering so great a distance, alone and unprotected, among these barbarous Spaniards. And, *O mon Dieu!* when I had almost gained the shelter of Gazan's lines, I fell into the power of that fearful creature, from whose savage treatment you have so bravely rescued me."

"Where did you meet with him, madame?"

"Wandering in the pass of Lanz,—for I was compelled to seek the most unfrequented paths. Clad in the habit of some of the *religieux* of this country, he met me. I had nothing to fear from one who wore the garb of peace. I confided in him: he offered to become my guide, and led me hither. You know the rest. Ah, monsieur! complete your kindness, I beseech you, and see me in safety to the French outposts!"

"What you ask of me, madame, I cannot perform, and I say so with regret. 'Tis three miles from this to the enemy's position. I cannot escort you myself, being on a particular duty, and I have not the means of sending you thither; yet, believe me, for the sake of poor D'Estouville's first love I would do much."

This was said in a tone of feeling, slightly mingled with reproach, and the colour of the lady came and went while she gazed on Ronald with a look of considerable surprise.

"Monsieur," said she, after a pause, "did you know Major d'Estouville?"

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"Intimately, although a Frenchman and an enemy. I beheld him die."

"At Merida?" Her lip quivered.

"Yes, madame."

"Poor Victor!" said the baroness thoughtfully.

"The last words he uttered were your name,—Diane de Montmichel. He expired in great agony, on a bed of straw, stretched on the cold pavement of an ancient chapel."

"*Merci!* Ah, monsieur! do not, do not tell me any more of this!" said she, covering her face with her hands,—which, I may observe, were very small and beautifully formed,—and beginning to weep and sob. "I dare not think of Victor now,—now when the wedded wife of another! To do so would be a sin, even although he is dead."

"D'Estouville told me his story. He loved you very truly, madame."

"I know that. You will certainly think me very cruel in deserting him, but Heaven knows I did not do so wilfully; I was not entirely to blame. At Lillebonne we understood that he had been killed; and long I wept and sorrowed for him, and protested that, until death, I would remain unwedded for his sake. Monsieur le Baron made proposals for my hand, and it was given him by my parent even before my consent was obtained. Terror, sorrow, and domestic persecution did the rest, and I became the bride of the new suitor, who indeed loves me very dearly, and I have every reason to be grateful to him. A coronet is a gay and attractive thing; yet think not, monsieur, that I have forgotten poor Victor, though I struggle with my heart to teach it the duty it owes the baron. One cannot have two loves for one heart," she added, sobbing and blushing.

"Well, madame," said Stuart, anxious to end her embarrassment, "some arrangement must be made. First, let us leave this place."

"*Eh bien!*" said the lady joyfully; and beginning to bustle about, she put her dilapidated dress in some order. "But," added she, shrugging her shoulders, "for where, monsieur?"

"With your permission, madame, to my picquet at the foot of the hill, in the first place," replied Stuart, consulting his watch. "I have been absent nearly an hour. Hah! there will be the devil to pay should I be missed."

"Ay will there, sir," said Evan, who had leaned his chin upon the muzzle of his piece, and 'glowered' with considerable surprise during the sudden and animated conversation which his master had carried on so glibly with the strange lady. "I hae been keepin' my lug to the wind, to hearken if ony soonds cam up the brae, but there has been naething asteer as yet. Ye hae nae been missed; but, gude save us, sir, let's awa before waur comes o't! Fassifern 'the chief' himsel's on duty; and whan he gangs the round, a bonnie kick up there will be gin ye're no at your post; and ye ken the cornel is waur than the deil to warsle wi'." Stuart knew that this was good and sound advice, however homely its delivery; and he prepared to rejoin his picquet, before Cameron, who was field-officer on duty, might visit it.

By pinning up here and there, tucking up one thing and letting out another, the lady wrought away rapidly with her neat and nimble little hands, working as only a Frenchwoman could have done, and in three minutes, her travel-stained and disordered attire was nicely and very passably arranged. Ronald offered his assistance, but the lady dispensed with it, thanking him with a smile, and saying he "could not be a very adroit *femme de chambre*." The glossy locks were smoothly placed over her white forehead, and the crushed bonnet had almost resumed its true Parisian shape. Its draggled feathers were cast aside, but the rich white veil she disposed gracefully over the front; and, looking at Stuart with a

glance of mingled archness, coquetry, and timidity, observed that she was "attired somewhat more *à la mode*," and took his proffered arm.

"Ah, monsieur!" said she, "once more I entreat you, do not deliver me up as a prisoner to be sent to England,—that horrid place!"

"Not if I can help it,—I pledge you my word of honour. In transferring you to the French lines, I incur considerable risk; but as the distance is so short, I will see if it can possibly be done before day breaks."

He threw his ample cloak around her, and giving strict injunctions to Evan not to acquaint his comrades who the lady was, began to descend the hill as quickly as the trembling steps of the latter would permit along such a dark and rugged path. Before leaving the hut, Evan took care to break and destroy all the offensive weapons it contained, saying as he did so, "that fules and bairns shudna hae chappin' sticks." He proposed to set the hut in a "bleeze," to light their way down the hill, but his master at once objected. The darkness renewed the terrors of the young lady.

"Is the way long, monsieur?" asked she in a faltering tone.

"O no,—quite near. You see the picquet-fire yonder. Ah, madame! how fortunate I am in having come so opportunely to your rescue."

"Oh! I shall never forget you in my prayers,—never, monsieur."

"But why are you trembling so much? Surely you are not afraid of me?"

"O no! your behaviour is too cavalier-like and gentle for that; and we have become quite like very old friends in half an hour's time."

"Do you fear the darkness, then?"

"*Mon dieu!* Ah! the darkness is nothing new to me. Alas!" replied she, shrugging her shoulders, "since the field of Vittoria I have passed every night in dark and lonely places; and I wonder now how one so timid, and so delicately nurtured, has not sunk under all the fears and privations I have undergone for some days and nights past." The lady started. At that moment the voice of a sentinel was heard to give the usual challenge.

"Who comes, there?"

"Rounds!" answered the bold voice of Fassifern, and the tramp of his horse's hoofs rang on the roadway between the mountains.

"Stand, rounds!" replied the sentry, porting his musket, and so on; with the usual ceremony, the parole and countersign were given and received.

"Excuse me, madame, but for a minute," said Stuart. "I am just in time; an instant later, and I should have been missed." Leaving the side of the trembling lady, he bustled about, and got his picquet under arms.

On the departure of Fassifern, whose movements the baroness had watched with no ordinary feelings of caution and fear, Evan was despatched for Macdonald, whom he found enjoying himself with some other officers at a wine-house in Elizondo. He came promptly enough, and was not a little surprised when Ronald requested as a favour, that he would escort a young lady to within sight of the French lines, explaining at the same time, in as few words as possible, her story and the nature of her situation.

Alister at once accepted the honour of being her convoy. "But," said he, looking into the gloom which surrounded them, "the route is confoundedly dreary across the mountains to the rock of Maya,—Gazan's post."

"I am perfectly aware of it," replied Stuart, with an air of pique. "'Tis impossible the baroness can go alone, and gallantry requires us to set Wellington's orders at defiance for once, and not deliver her up. I would have escorted her myself, but cannot leave my picquet."

"Monsieur," said the baroness, "I am indeed sorry to trouble you; but surely you do not complain of the duty—"

"On, no! impossible, madame," exclaimed Alister, the blood mounting to his handsome features at the idea, while, gracefully raising his bonnet, he observed her fair face by the red light of the fire. "But will you intrust yourself to the guidance of one who is entirely a stranger, through a road so dark and dangerous?"

"I have no alternative, alas!" said she, bending her bright eyes into the gloom, as if she strove to pierce the depths beyond. She shuddered. "'Tis very dark, indeed, messieurs. I have no alternative but to go, or to remain and be sent a captive to Britain. Monsieur, I will go with you. I will depend on the untarnished honour of a British officer, that I shall be conveyed in safety to Gazan's sentinels at the rock of Maya."

"Madame, you do me an honour never to be forgotten," answered Macdonald, with a bow profound enough for any "puffing senor" of Old Castile, while the lady took his arm.

"Lend me your dirk, Stuart. I left mine at the wine *caza*," said Alister, adjusting his belt and putting his basket-hilt free of plaid, sash, tassels, &c. "It is as well to be prepared for any sudden attack, and the baroness must be my warrant that I am not made a prisoner of by some of Gazan's scouts or sharpshooters. So then, good bye, Stuart; I will come brattling up the brae in an hour or so."

The lady kissed her hand to Stuart and departed with Macdonald, feeling a confidence and assurance of safety which probably no British lady would have felt, if intrusted to the charge of a foreigner under the same peculiar circumstances.

"And this is Diane de Montmichel, the false love of poor Victor d'Estouville," thought Ronald, as her light figure disappeared in the darkness. "Well, I believe, if all the tales his friend De Mesmai told me were true, one cannot look for much faith in French women!"

For Macdonald's return he waited with considerable anxiety, which increased when the time by which he expected him passed away without his appearing, and day began to dawn on the Maya heights. He could not help dreading that Alister had not been wary enough, and had been captured by the French advanced sentinels. If so, the escape of the baroness would come to light, and he feared the Marquis of Wellington would make a deuced unpleasant row about it. He also remembered Narvaez Cifuentes, whom for some time he had forgotten, and supposed that his friend might have fatally encountered this savage bandit and some of his companions.

The morning had now dawned, but the valleys between Elizondo and the rock of Maya, and even the summits of the Lower Pyrenees, were still almost involved in darkness. Shaking the dew from their booming wings, the eagles were soaring through the blue sky from their eyries among the cliffs, and the morning breeze, as it swept along the mountain sides, bore with it the delightful perfume of the aromatic plants and little shrubs which flourish so plentifully in all waste places throughout Spain. From the dying embers of the picquet-fire a puff of smoke curled now and then on the pure air, but scarcely a sound woke the echoes of the place, save the proud and steady tread of the sentries as they strode to and fro on their posts.

Beyond the advanced chain of the latter, Ronald wandered far in search of Macdonald, and to await his return seated himself upon a fragment of rock, and watched attentively the long valley which lay between him and the Lower or French Pyrenees, varying this employment, by holloaing to the eagles as he used to do at home, or by hurling stones at the glossy black ravens as they screamed aloud, flapped their wings, and from the

rocks of the surrounding wilderness stared at him as an intruder upon their solitude. The voice of some one singing a Gaelic song,—

"*Cha teid mis a chaoidh,*"*

caused him to spring to his feet.

"Holloa, Alister! Is that you, my man?"

"Yes," replied Macdonald, springing up the rocks to where Ronald sat, and leaping to his side with the activity of a deer; "but you nearly made an end of me a dozen times. Every minute you sent a large rock sousing down the ravine upon my very path. Did you not hear me shout? Why, man, you have but half the ear of a Highland forester! I hope I am in time for the marquis's arrival?"

"Yes; but what a devilish long time you have been! Madame the baroness and her squire were certainly in no hurry to reach the rock of Maya."

"Why no; to tell you the truth," replied Macdonald, laughing as heartily as his lack of breath would permit him, "we consulted our own convenience and pleasure, and it has been the most agreeable night, or rather morning, march since I first saw the spires of Lisbon."

"So I suppose. But did you escape the French sentries?"

"How would I have been here else, Ronald? They are posted at the foot of the rock of Maya, and must have been blind if they did not see me. I led the young lady within a hundred yards of them, and there bade her tenderly adieu."

"She thanked you, of course?"

"By so delightful a salute, that I began to persuade her to return with me; but she placed her little hand upon my mouth, and, as the novels say, vanished from my sight,—in other words, crossed the enemy's lines: so now, I suppose, she is in the arms of monsieur the baron, or as he would be more appropriately styled, Jock Law, laird of the Clapperknowes. What a pity 'tis that so sweet a girl should be the wife of that gruff old humbug! Hah! there go the pipes!"

"Wellington has come!"

The out-picquets rejoined their several brigades, which in a few minutes were in motion, and marched from Elizondo with their bands playing, and entered among the mountains towards that part of Maya where General Gazan's corps were in position. In the forenoon they came in sight of the enemy, when Sir Rowland Hill halted, and Wellington, attended by a single aide-de-camp, rode forward to reconnoitre. Ronald Stuart had now, for the first time, an opportunity of particularly observing that great leader, of whom the world then heard, and were yet to hear, so much.

He was mounted on a slight but stout crop-tailed horse, without trappings; a pair of plain holsters were at his saddle-bow, and a short sabre hung from his belt. The exceeding plainness of his attire—a coarse blue cloak, and weather-beaten cocked-hat, totally destitute of ornament—contrasted strongly with the richly-laced jacket and pelisse of his aide, an officer of the 10th Hussars, that regiment of exquisite celebrity. Wellington gave a keen but hasty glance along the ranks of the bronzed Highlanders as he rode past, and then bent his sharp eyes on the heights, where the dark columns of French infantry appeared in position, their long lines of serried arms glancing as usual in the sun. For about three minutes the marquis carefully made a reconnoissance of the foe through his telescope, and then issued his orders.

"Sir William!" said he.

General Stuart, a fine old soldier, with hair white as snow, a bronzed

* I will never go with him.

visage, and a purple coat adorned with a black aigulet, rode up, and touched his coarse cocked-hat of glazed leather.

"With the second brigade you will cross the Bidassoa, by the pathway leading from Elizondo, and ascending the mountains, turn the enemy's right. You will carry the rock of Maya at the point of the bayonet."

"It shall be done, my lord," replied Stuart, confidently, as he drove spurs into his horse and galloped back to the second brigade; while Sir Rowland with the marquis ascended to an eminence, to observe the operations and success of this movement. While Stuart with his troops moved off and disappeared among the rocks and orchards of Elizondo, the other brigades remained under arms, and found, with considerable chagrin, that their part of the game was not yet come. After remaining for some time—an hour, perhaps—watching attentively the French lines, the sound of distant firing, and the appearance of smoke curling along the hill-sides, announced that the gallant Stuart had commenced the attack. Every ear and every eye were all attention. The fire became closer and more rapid; a cheer was heard, and in ten minutes the whole second brigade, consisting of the brave "Old Buffs," the 31st, the 57th, and 66th English regiments, were seen rushing up the hill under a close and destructive shower of shot, which they heeded less than if it had been a shower of rain, although it thinned their numbers deplorably. Forward they went with the bayonet, and the right wing of the French melted away before them.

The position was turned, and the cheers of the victors were echoed by their comrades below, whose blood was fiercely roused by the sound of the conflict.

"They have done well," said Wellington. "Forward! the light troops."

The command was obeyed with promptitude. The 6th Caçadores, the 71st Highlanders, and all the light companies, moved off double quick, and the ravines among the hills rang with the clank of accoutrements and the tramp of their feet. These auxiliaries scrambled directly up the face of the hill, and the 50th regiment, moving to the front, opened a deadly fire on Gazan's left, while his troops were making ineffectual attempts to recover the heights on their right.

Exposed thus to a fire on their flanks, and galled in front by a cloud of sharp-shooters, who were scattered among the rocks and bushes—bolting up every instant to fire, and then ducking down to reload—the French began to retreat down the hills towards France, but slowly, and keeping up their fire with gallant yet singular determination.

The coolness displayed by the light infantry in this skirmish was truly astonishing. To them it appeared like ordinary shooting—a mere amusement. The Highlanders and the caçadores were seen scampering hither and thither, leaping from rock to rock, firing and kneeling, or throwing themselves flat on the earth, laughing and jesting in a manner which none but those that have been eye-witnesses of such an affair can imagine. Even the deep groan, the sudden shriek of anguish, as some comrade, when struck by a French bullet, tossed aside his musket and heavily fell prone on the earth, wallowing in his blood, did not cool or restrain them; and thus they continued to advance for several miles, strewing the ground with dead, and peppering the retiring foe from every available point.

Gazan threw out a body of chasseurs to cover the retreat of his forces down the mountains, and with them an irregular fight was maintained the whole day. Night scarcely put an end to the contest, and allowed the jaded French to find a shelter in their own country. The night was excessively dark, and yet the firing continued for nearly two hours after the gloom had fairly set in, and only ceased when friends became confounded

with foes. Seaton narrowly escaped being bayoneted by two of his own favourite light-bobs. Several of the French went the wrong way in the dark, and, falling among the British, were captured and sent to the rear. The effect of the midnight firing was peculiarly fine, in such a wild wilderness as the Pyrenees. Several thousand muskets flashing incessantly through the gloom, and wakening the myriad echoes of the mountains and gorges, presented a very singular sight, the pleasure of viewing which was considerably lessened by the continual whistling of shot; until the bugles on both sides called in the stragglers, and the British, giving one hearty cheer of triumph and defiance, withdrew to their main body.

The lines of the latter were now established along the heights of Maya. The whole of the mountains were enveloped in a dense fog; a tremendous storm of rain succeeded, but the troops, the unhappy out-picquets excepted, were snug under canvas. But there were exposed the hundreds of killed and wounded, who could neither be sought nor attended to then, and who lay scattered over miles of contested ground, under all the fury of the pitiless elements. For the dead it mattered not; but many of the wounded expired during the raging of the storm, which accelerated their end.

Seated in his tent, on the sloping sides of which the rain was rushing down, Stuart wrote letters for Inchavon-house and Lochisla. He found their composition no easy task, as the candle, which was stuck in a bottle, flickered in the wind, and sputtered with the rain-drops which oozed through the canvas sides of his bell-shaped covering. He held out hopes of his speedy return,—but he had often done so before; for every new victory was deemed by the troops a precursor of peace, and of return to their native homes. * * * *

Having now gained the important heights of Maya, Lord Wellington retired to join another part of his army. The celebrated pass was left to the care of Fassifern with the first brigade, which encamped on the very summit of the hills, where the high road from the fertile vale of El Bastan descends to France.

The second brigade was posted in a valley to the right, and the Portuguese of the Condé d'Amarante occupied a mountain in front of the hamlet of Erraza, where a brigade of the same nation was quartered, under the command of Colonel Ashworth. The 82nd (Prince of Wales's Volunteers) occupied another part of the hills, about two miles off; and to these troops was left the defence of the pass of Maya, for which they were to fight to the last gasp,—orders which, when the time came, were faithfully and nobly performed.

CHAPTER VIII.

PASS OF MAYA.—PYRENEES.

A MONTH elapsed without the sound of a shot being heard, and the troops at the passes of Maya and Roncesvalles lay quietly encamped and unmolested amidst the fine scenery of the Pyrenees. The weather was now remarkably agreeable, and the officers procured plenty of wine from Elizondo and other Navarese towns in their rear, and they were beginning to be as comfortable as it is possible for troops to be under canvas. But a cloud was gathering in the valleys of Gascony below them.

The great victory at Vittoria, and the important events which followed it, had not failed deeply to interest and concern Napoleon, to rouse his wrath and to wound his pride. That object for which he had shed so much French blood was now completely wrested from his grasp, and France herself re-

mained in imminent peril while the armies of the conqueror hovered on the mountains which overlooked her territories. Fresh conscriptions were levied, and again France, in her folly, poured forth another army, which directed its march to the Pyrenees, to fight the battles of the insatiable Buonaparte. Soult was recalled from Germany to place himself at its head, as the "Lieutenant of the Emperor." Joining the French army on the 13th of July, 1813, he commenced re-organizing and preparing for a second invasion of Spain, with an energy and activity which restored the confidence, and roused, as usual, the arrogance of the French troops, who commenced their march with the intention of driving the allies beyond the Ebro, and celebrating the birthday of the great Emperor at Vittoria.

At that time Lord Wellington's responsibilities and difficulties were not of a slight nature, having to cover the siege of two strong fortresses and defend the wide space between them, which compelled him to extend and weaken his line. His skill was evinced in the distribution of his army, which he posted in the best manner likely to defend effectually the passes of the Pyrenees, and to cover the investments of San Sebastian and Pampeluna.

To effect the relief of the latter was the first grand object of the Duke of Dalmatia. From St. Jean Pied-de-Port, on the morning of Sunday, the 25th July, he marched thirty-five thousand men against the troops of General Byng, occupying the pass of Roncesvalles, which post they completely turned in the afternoon, after a most desperate conflict, from which the general and Sir Lowry Cole, who had moved up to his support, were compelled to retire.

On the same day General Drouet led thirteen thousand men against the right of Hill's position,—Cameron's command at the Maya pass, which he had orders to force, as the Highlander had to defend it,—*at all hazards.* At the time the attack was made, no movement was expected, yet Drouet found the British not altogether unprepared for such an event. It was a beautiful Sunday, and the heat, even on the summits of the Pyrenees, was intense. As it was not supposed that the enemy were near, the tents were all standing, just as they had been for a month before; and the camp and baggage-mules were miles away down on the Spanish side, whither they were usually taken for grass.

Stuart on that morning had wandered from the encampment to some distance, where he was enjoying the appearance of solitude, so like that of his "Highland home," which reigned far and wide around him. The vast hills rose on every side, heaving their green summits to the sky. A death-like stillness prevailed, save when now and then broken by the scream of a wild bird, the hollow flap of a partridge's wing, or the faint and far-off tinkle of a mountain rill murmuring through some solitary gorge, leaping from rock to rock as it descended to the bright plains of Gascony or Bearn. For nearly an hour he had wandered about there, when his solitary reveries were broken by the sound of a distant shot, the echoes of which rang among the splintered rocks and grassy peaks, recalling him at once to the present; and he hurried away to the camp, where the brigade was getting under arms, the soldiers mustering with their usual rapidity and coolness, without betraying the least surprise or confusion. From an out-picquet the word had been passed that the French "were in motion in front," and the fixing of fresh flints, snapping of locks, unrolling and examining of ammunition, gave token of every preparation being made to receive them with all due honour. Nearly an hour elapsed, and no more was seen or heard of the foe. All began to suppose it a false alarm, and many of the officers went forward to the outposts to reconnoitre.

"Where are the enemy now, Armstrong?" asked Cameron of an officer

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of the 71st, commanding the picquet which had given the alarm. "In which direction did you see them?"

"Directly north, and far down on the French side," replied the other, pointing with his sword; "we distinctly saw a strong party pass yon defile between the mountains: the glitter of their arms was apparent to us all."

"I'm afraid their feet were cloven," observed Seaton. "I see nothing but a herd of cattle crossing the defile you speak of."

"Horned nowte, just black short-legged Argyleshires," said Dugald, who, as usual, was close to Cameron's skirts. "I see them plain aneuch mysel, sirs; but the loons may be amang the hills for a' that." A loud laugh arose at the old man's observations.

"Well, gentlemen," said Armstrong, while his cheek reddened with anger, and he cast a furious glance on Dugald Mhor, "you are all at liberty to think as you please; but I tell you that there are cattle among the hills carrying bayonets on their horns, and that such is the fact some here may learn to their cost, ere long."

"What fire the borderer displays," said Ronald, as Armstrong left the group abruptly; "and here is Alister his sub, quite fierce likewise about the matter."

"Search round," chimed in Campbell, in the same tone of jest; "search about, and probably we shall find the pig-skin at the bottom of which they saw the enemy. I remember once in Egypt, that old Ludovick Lisle—"

"What mean you, gentlemen?" said Macdonald, angrily; "do you take us for fools? I believe we have seen the enemy often enough to know them."

"Halt, Macdonald; you take our jests far too seriously," said Stuart. "If you saw the French, where are they now?"

"In front!" was the tart reply.

"They have been so, down in Gascony, for this month past."

"By all eternity! 'tis something new for me to have assertions doubted thus," replied Macdonald, considerably ruffled, yet loath to have high words with his old friend; and adding, "I will make no further explanations," he turned and left them, following Armstrong, who was reconnoitring intently through a telescope. While Stuart's cheek grew red with anger at the contemptuous manner in which Macdonald took leave of him, his sleeve was plucked by old Dugald Cameron.

"Dinna speak to him juist the noo," whispered that aged retainer solemnly; "his birse is up, and it is an ill thing to warsle wi' a Macdonald at sic a time. Dinna gloom wi' hot faces at ane anither, for I tell you one will no behauld the ither lang, sae turn not the back o' your hand upon him; he may be mixed wi' the moots ere the hills grow dark wi' the gloaming, or redden again in the morning sun."

"What do you mean, Dugald?" asked Stuart, surprised at the Highlander's manner.

"Sir, I am farer seen than maist folk, and so was my faither before me. Baith loud and lang did you and Macdonald laugh ower your wine in the corsel's tent last nicht, and every laugh o' the puir lad gaed to my heart. I kent by its hollow ringing he was *fey*."

"Fey?" replied the other, respect for Dugald's white haffets alone restraining a violent inclination to laugh; "fey, Dugald? How?"

"Loud laughter, I mean laughter such as his, aye portends sudden death. Ony cailloch that ever wore a mutch, or ony giglet o' a lassie that ever wore a snood, will tell ye the same thing, sir. See dinna girn at or be thrawn gebbit wi' young Inchkenneth, for he'll no be lang amang us. Mony heads will there be on the heather ere the sun gaes doon." Dugald

moved off, leaving Stuart considerably surprised at his superstition. At that moment Alister rushed towards them, with his bonnet in his hand.

"Look ye now, gentlemen," he exclaimed, tossing his long feathers in the direction of the winding way which led to France, "what call you these?"

Even while he spoke, a dense column of French infantry appeared in the defile between the mountains, and a cloud of others, battalion after battalion, with their tri-colours fluttering in the breeze, advanced in succession, until thirteen thousand bayonets were gleaming in the light of the noonday sun. It was the whole of General Drouet's division.

"There is nae heather here, but I thocht and I said there would be mony a head on the green swaird ere the hills grew mirk in the gloaming," muttered Dugald ominously, as he viewed the advance of the French with kindling eyes. With the first blast of the bugle the troops were again under arms, and marched to the front of the pass to stem the approaching torrent; and, resolute as the soldiers were, they knew that the attempt to keep their position against such an overwhelming power was vain, unless Lord Wellington, who was distant at San Sebastian, could by some means succour them. But obedience is the *first* duty of the soldier, and their orders were to defend the passes and fight to the last,—orders never yet mistaken by British troops.

The out-picquets first opened their fire upon the advancing masses, and although seconded by a body of light troops, were forced of course to give way. The 28th and 39th regiments, from Wilson's brigade, moved off to support the picquets on the right. With courage and resolution unparalleled, these corps sustained the onset of their opponents, whose tremendous fire however compelled them to waver and recoil. The 34th or Cumberland regiment, with the 50th, came to their assistance. These last, forming a junction, rushed upon the French while exposed to the deadly fire of their extended front, and with unexampled intrepidity charged them with the bayonet, giving a check to their progress up the mountains. The French returned the charge, but at the same time made a flank movement, which their great numbers enabled them to do easily, to surround and cut off their rash assailants, who were at once placed in a critical position.

It was at that moment that Cameron brought up his Highlanders, and restored confidence to the regiments which had been falling into confusion. It is impossible to describe the scene which the Maya heights presented at that time. The deafening roar of the musketry,—the driving clouds of smoke,—the tumultuous yells of the French, who were fierce, wild, and eager to wash away in British blood the disgraces of Vittoria, almost confounded those who were then for the first time under fire. The advancing enemy continued to shout more like savages than European soldiers, but their tremendous shower of shot was fast mowing down the little band which so gallantly endeavoured to resist them. Like a hail-shower the heavy leaden bullets were falling everywhere, and tearing up the turf even after they had passed through the bodies of the soldiers,—so close had the contending parties now come together.

The British had stood firm without flinching an inch; but the French, who were now fighting in a great disorganized mob, had continued to advance, by the *rear* men pushing on the *front*, until within thirty paces of the British line; and at so short a distance it may easily be supposed that the shot on both sides told with fearful effect, especially among the dense masses of the French, before whom, in five minutes, arose a pile of their own dead and wounded like a breast-work. Beyond this ghastly line they would not advance an inch, nor could they be prevailed upon to do so, even by the most strenuous exertions of their officers, who, whenever the smoke cleared away a little, were observed brandishing their sabres, waving their

colours and eagles, and enthusiastically crying, "*Vive la France! Vive l'Empereur! Vive la Gloire!*" But their soldiers heeded them not, and continued to load and fire with the utmost *sang froid*, but would not be led to the charge.

The brave 71st Highland Light Infantry, after fighting with their usual obstinacy and intrepidity, had been compelled to give way, by which three Portuguese pieces of cannon fell into the possession of the French. To recapture these, a desperate attempt was made by Lieutenant Armstrong, who, at the head of eight private soldiers, as brave and as rash as himself, rushed furiously on the enemy. With his sword in one hand and his bonnet in the other, the gallant Borderer was seen amidst the smoke leading them on; but all perished under the leaden shower, within a few feet of the French bayonets. After being reduced to half its number of officers and men, this fine regiment began to retire in disorder. The 34th and 50th were in the same perilous predicament, owing to the front and flank movements of the enemy, when Fassifern with his Highlanders entered the bloody arena. As the battalion moved in open column of companies, along the hill-top from the camp towards the pass, Cameron addressed a few words to them, exhorting them to fight to the last man, and maintain the ancient fame of the north. He reminded them that they were not fighting merely for the defence of Spain, but of those homes where their kindred dwelt. His voice became drowned in the din of the conflict which rolled along the face of the hills, and Stuart heard only the concluding part of his address, and part of it was in Gaelic. "Highlanders! we shall have a bloody sabbath here to-day; but we go forth to shed our blood that the sabbath-bells may ring in peace at home, in those green straths and wooded glens where many a Scottish heart is praying for us at this hour." The sound of the pipes, as the piper on the flank of each company struck up "*On wi' the Tartan,*" was the only reply. What a gush of indescribable feeling came through every breast, when the blast of the pipe was heard at such a moment! Every eye lighted up, and every cheek flushed: the effect of the sound of that strange instrument on the sons of Caledonia is well known.

"In halls of joy and in scenes of mourning it has prevailed,—it has animated her warriors in battle, and welcomed them back after their toils to the homes of their love and the hills of their nativity. Its strains were the first sounded in the ears of infancy, and they are the last to be forgotten in the wanderings of age. Even Highlanders will allow that it is not the gentlest of instruments; but when far from their mountain-homes, what sounds, however melodious, could thrill their hearts like one burst of their own wild native pipe? The feelings which other instruments awaken are general and undefined, because they talk alike to Frenchmen, Spaniards, Germans, and Highlanders, for they are common to all; but the bag-pipe is sacred to Scotland, and speaks a language which Scotsmen only feel. It talks to them of home and all *the past*, and brings before them, on the burning shores of India, the wild hills and oft-frequented streams of Caledonia,—the friends that are thinking of them, and the sweethearts and wives that are weeping for them there. And need it be told here to how many fields of danger and victory its proud strains have led? There is not a battle that is honourable to Britain in which its war-blast has not sounded; when every other instrument has been hushed by the confusion and carnage of the scene, it has been borne into the thick of the battle, and far in the advance its bleeding but devoted bearer, sinking to the earth, has sounded at once encouragement to his countrymen—and his own coronach!"*

* Preface to Macdonald's "Ancient Martial Music of Scotland."

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Ranald-dhu with his comrades strove to call up the "fierce native daring" of the Highlanders, who continued to move quickly forward. The balls now began to hiss and tear up the turf around them, now and then striking down some poor fellow, who was left rolling on the ground in agony.

"The battalion will form line on the grenadiers," cried Fassifern,—"double quick!" The movement was performed with the rapidity and precision of a home-review. As the covering serjeant of the light company took up the ground of alignement, holding his long pike aloft, a shot struck him in the head, passing through his right eye, and he fell dead. The line formed across his body, and the word of command from Seaton, "Light company; halt,—front,—dress!" had scarcely been heard on the left, before the orderly bugler, who stood by Cameron's side, sounded to fire, and the hoarse braying *piobrachd* now rang along the line.

The first volley of the Highlanders gave a temporary check to the enemy, and enabled the 34th and "old Half-hundred" to reform in order. The French line was now, as I have said, within thirty paces, and every lineament and feature of their dark and sallow faces could be distinctly seen at so short a distance. They were now in the midst of all the uproar, the smoke, the blood, the danger, the mingling of hideous groans and cries,—in short, the hell upon earth of a hot engagement, in which both parties became so heated by the slaughter around them, that all the softer passions were forgotten, and they longed, with a tiger-like feeling, to bury their blades in each other's hearts.

Ronald felt his pulses thickening, the blood tingling in his ears, for the sound of the musketry had deafened them to everything else, and his heart rebounded within his bosom until he could almost hear it beat; but it was with feelings the reverse of fear,—a wish to leap headlong among the enemy, to cut them down with his sword as he would whin-bushes, and to revenge the slaughter the terrible fire of so dense a column was making among his gallant and devoted regiment. So thick was the smoke become, that he could scarcely see the third file from him, and only at times it cleared up a little. What was then revealed served only to infuriate him the more. The Highlanders were lying in heaps across and across each other,—piled up just as they fell; while their comrades fought above them, firing and reloading with all the rapidity in their power, until struck by a shot, and down they fell to perish unnoticed and unknown. Almost every shot killed; for the distance was short, and the wounds were hideous and ghastly, the blood spouting forth from the orifice as if through a syringe.

Now and then Ronald felt his heart momentarily recoil within him when he beheld some poor soldier, while in the full possession of life and energy, toss aside his firelock, and fall suddenly backwards across some heap of corpses—stricken dead. But a battle-field is no place for sympathy, and the feeling lasted but for an instant.

"Shall we never get the word to charge?" cried Seaton fiercely. "O Stuart! this is indeed infernal work,—to be mauled thus, and within a few feet of their muzzles."

"A charge would be madness, and our utter destruction. A single regiment against thirteen columns of Frenchmen—"

"We possess the pass, though. Poor Macivar is on the turf, and Macdonell is shot through the heart. Hah! see to the left: the 50th are giving way— God! I am struck!" He sunk to the earth, with the blood gushing from his mouth and nostrils. A shot had pierced his breast, beating in with it a part of the silver breast-plate, and in great agony he rolled over several times, grasping and tearing the turf with fruitless efforts to regain his feet.

"Never mind me, light bobs, but stand by Cameron to the last. Hurrah!" Convulsively he strove to raise himself up; but another bullet passed through his neck, and a deadly paleness overspread his countenance. He gave his claymore one last flourish, he cast a glance of fury and despair towards the enemy, and expired. Scarcely a minute had elapsed since he was struck, and now he was dead!

"Poor Seaton!" muttered Ronald, and turned away. He had now the command of the light company; the other lieutenant lay bleeding to death a few yards off, and in the intervals of pain crying fruitlessly for water. One soldier, who had been struck by a shot across the bridge of the nose, became blind, and rushed frantically among the enemy, to perish under their bayonets. Another, who had his lower jaw carried off, presented a horrible spectacle as he lay on the ground, vomiting up blood through his open throat, and lolling out his exposed and swollen tongue.*

"Ninety-second! Prepare to charge!" cried Cameron, animated to fury by this deadly slaughter of his regiment. "Gordon Highlanders! prepare to charge," he repeated, as he galloped along the broken line with eyes flashing fire, while he waved his bonnet aloft. "Close up,—keep together; shoulder to shoulder, Highlandmen,—charge!" Ronald alone heard him, and repeated the rash order; but their voices were unheard amidst the din of the conflict. At that moment the smoke cleared a little away, and in front Ronald perceived a French grenadier sling his musket, and advancing a few paces before his friends, stoop down to rifle an officer of the 71st regiment, who was lying dead between the lines.

"Iverach, mark that plundering rascal," said Stuart; "aim steadily."

Evan fired and missed.

"That was not like a man from the braes of Strathonan!" said his master angrily. "Fire, Ian Macdonald; you are one of the best shots in the company."

"My father shot the *Damh mhor a Vonalia* toon in Padenoch,† and I was aye thouchten to pe a petterer marksman than him," replied the young Highlander coolly, as he levelled his piece and fired. The Frenchman fell forward, beat the earth with his heels for a moment, and then lay motionless.

"He's toon, sir: I have pitten a flea in his lug," replied the marksman, as he bit another cartridge.

For two hours this desperate and unequal conflict was maintained. The other regiments had given way in disorder, and the Highlanders began to waver, after the loss of their gallant colonel, who had retired severely wounded. Nearly all the officers were dead or dying on the ground, while others were endeavouring to find their way to some place where they could get their wounds dressed. Two alone were left with the regiment,—Ronald and another lieutenant, who, being senior, had the command, and finding that the battalion was reduced to less than a company, ordered it to retire towards the pass of Maya, having lost in two hours five-and-twenty officers, and three hundred rank and file. The other regiments were cut up in nearly the same manner, but none had lost so many officers. Stuart carried the king's colour, and a serjeant the regimental—all the ensigns being killed or wounded. Poor Alister Macdonald was left on the field among the former. A shot had passed through his head, and he died without a groan. His friend Ronald was considerably startled when he saw him lying dead. The prediction of Dugald Mhor flashed upon his mind, and

* This man lived for many years afterwards, having the loss supplied by a mask, through which soups were induced by a pipe for his sustenance. For pension he received the sum of ninepence per day.

† A famous white stag, shot in Badenoch in 1807. It was believed by the Highlanders to be *more than* 200 *years old*.

he looked round for that singular old Highlander; but he was away with Fassifern, on the road for the village of Irun.

The whole of the British forces were now in retreat before the overwhelming power of the enemy, column after column of whom continued to press forward. The defenders of the pass retired on the rock of Maya, abandoning their camp and baggage to the French. On retreating through the pass, Major Campbell, whose horse had been as usual shot under him, and who had first left the field, owing to a severe wound, headed a few Highlanders, who scrambled like squirrels up the face of a precipitous crag, from the summit of which they kept up a hot fire upon the French troops, not only holding them decidedly in check, and giving their friends time to retire, but revenging the previous slaughter in front of the pass. Here it may be worth mentioning that Major Campbell lost his celebrated cudgel, which, in the enthusiasm of the moment, he sent flying among the foe, and unhorsed a mounted officer. He gave them also much weightier proofs of his good-will. Just as the flank of a column of French grenadiers reached the base of the crag occupied by the Highlanders, a tremendous fragment of rock, urged forward by the powerful hands of the major, came thundering down among them, rolling through the dense mass of men with irresistible force and fury, making a perfect but terrible lane, and doing as much mischief as a dozen bomb-shells. Every man below held his breath for a moment, and then cries of rage and fury burst from the whole division of Drouet; while the Scots, pouring upon them a parting salute of shot and stones, descended from the other side of the rock, and rejoined their comrades in double-quick time. Under the orders of General Stuart, the whole retired to the rock of Maya, those in the rear maintaining an irregular skirmish with the French; who, on perceiving this rearward movement, filled the air with cries of "Long live the great Emperor! Long live beautiful France!" mingled with shouts—absolute yells of triumph and exultation.

Thoroughly enraged and disheartened, the British continued to retire, yet anxiously expecting that succours from Lord Wellington would arrive in time to enable them to face about, and beat Soult before nightfall. As the little band of Highlanders descended straggling from the hills, Stuart saw a lady (the wife of an officer of the 50th) on horseback, and in a miserable situation. Her horse had stuck fast above the saddle-girths in a deep morass, and she was too much terrified and bewildered to leave it. The balls of the sharp-shooters were whistling past her every second, and she cried imploringly on the retreating Highlanders to yield her some assistance; but it was impossible, and she fell into the hands of the French. Her husband was lying dead, with his sword in his hand, in the gorge of the fatal pass. On the brigade of Sir Edward Barnes coming up from the rear, a new and sanguinary conflict took place; but the enemy were defeated, and the pass regained.

That night the shattered remains of the Gordon Highlanders bivouacked near Barrueta. The consternation of the inhabitants in the mountain villages, when the heights were abandoned, and the French again advancing, cannot be easily described. From Barrueta, Elizondo, Maya, and Huarte, men, women, and children, were seen pouring forth during the night, and descending the mountain paths by torch-light, bearing along, with infinite toil, their sick and infirm relatives, their bedding, furniture, &c., to save them from the remorseless invaders, who, they too well knew, would give all to the flames that was "too hot or too heavy" to carry off.

So eager were the French soldiers for plunder, that their searches were conducted upon a regular system. When a town was entered, every piece of furniture was broken, every plank raised, to see whether anything was

hidden or buried; and the hammer and small saw, carried by every man in his havresack, assisted greatly this unsoldierlike work. It is said, that in Germany the vaults of the churches, the very graves in the churchyards, were searched; and the brutality with which they treated those unfortunate Spaniards, male and female, who fell into their power, cannot be described. Therefore it is not to be wondered at that the Pyrenean mountaineers fled at their approach, as from a legion of devils.

The roads were likewise crowded with wounded officers and soldiers, pouring down from the passes of Maya and Roncesvalles. Those who were able to move were ordered to retire to Vittoria, which had already been converted into a vast hospital, and crowded to excess with the wounded of the great battle; and the miseries these unfortunates suffered, travelling without baggage or money in a strange country, weary, sick, and wounded, for a distance of one hundred miles during a hot season, are utterly inconceivable. Many wounds mortified, and became incurable; hundreds of men perished by the way-side of starvation and loss of blood, or reached Vittoria only to expire in the streets. Every medical officer had from ninety to a hundred patients on his list, and many lives were lost from the want of proper attendance.

The astounding intelligence that the Duke of Dalmatia had forced the Pyrenean passes, reached Lord Wellington at night, and promptly as usual he took means to concentrate his army, providing at the same time for the siege of San Sebastian and the blockade of Pampeluna. The right wing was in full retreat from the mountains when he directed it to halt, and soon arrived himself to direct measures for covering Pampeluna, within a few miles of which Soult, eager for its relief, had now arrived. The discomfited troops from Maya were ordered to march on the position before Pampeluna, and moved accordingly from Barrueta on Tuesday, the 27th. A melancholy spectacle the parade of the Gordon Highlanders presented on that morning! The colours, which had been shot almost to rags, were cased, and carried by non-commissioned officers; two young lieutenants had the command, and as the solitary piper, Ranald Macdonuildhu, blew the "gathering," he watched with a stern and louring visage the few survivors of the late conflict, as they paraded on the hill-side, falling one by one into their places. Here were five men of the grenadiers, twenty men of another company, ten of a third, two of a fourth, and many others were totally annihilated, neither officer nor private being present. The serjeant-major, with his arm in a sling, presented a list of the casualties to Lieutenant Logan, who commanded,—Logan of that Ilk, as he was named by the mess.

"Where is Captain Mac Ivor?"

"Killed, sir. I saw him lying dead, close by Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Macdonald."

"Where is Captain Bevan?"

"He retired, sir, with his arm shattered near the elbow, and expired at the moment Dr. Stuart attempted to remove the limb at the shoulder-socket."

"Where is Gordon?"

"Severely wounded, and gone to the rear."

"Grant?"

"Shot through the side."

"Macpherson and Macdonald,—Ranald Macdonuil, I mean?"

"Missing, sir." And so on—killed, wounded, and missing, was the answer to every question.

"God help us, sir!" said the worthy non-commissioned officer, as he raised his hand to his bonnet and turned away with a glistening eye;

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"but it's a heart-breaking thing to see the regiment cut up in this way."

The band was annihilated, and with a single drum and bagpipe the little party moved off, just as the morning sun rose above that deadly pass, where so many a gallant heart had grown cold, and ceased to beat for ever.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLOCK-HOUSE.—MINA.

HILL's division from the Pyrenees arrived at Pampeluna in time to share the fighting which ensued when Soult endeavoured to dislodge the allies on the 28th, but was repulsed with immense loss. Along the heights of Huarte the contest was very severe, and the bravery of the British was equalled only by that of their enemies. Every regiment charged with the bayonet; and the Highlanders,—ever at home at close quarters,—more than once. Both armies remained quiet during the 29th; but Wellington, having completed all his arrangements, attacked the left and centre of Soult's forces next morning, and defeated them with great slaughter. Upon this discomfiture, the marshal's only object was to secure a safe retreat into France. After a fruitless attempt to turn Sir Rowland Hill's position at La Zarza, and fighting until compelled to cease firing by night coming on, they abandoned their ground under the favouring shadow of the darkness, and on the morrow were discovered in full retreat for France by the pass of Donna Maria. The allies "followed them up" in hot pursuit, fighting and capturing at every yard of the way, and on the 1st of August again took possession of those hard-contested passes, while the French retired into their own country completely thrashed, but certainly not to their hearts' content. With the exception of a slight bayonet-wound in a charge at La Zarza, Ronald Stuart had escaped with a whole skin during all these hard conflicts, known generally as the battles of the Pyrenees. But how much the regiment had suffered may be inferred from the fact, that of the thousand men who had landed in Spain under its colours, about eighty only were in the ranks.

The aspect of the passes of Maya and Roncesvalles, when re-occupied, was at once revolting and humiliating. The corses of friends and foes lay yet unburied there; but the death-hunters, the guerillas, and those ferocious banditti who infested every part of Spain, had been there at work; and most of the bodies were lying naked as when they came into the world. Ronald found Captain MacIvor in this condition, with his broad-sword so glued and encrusted with gore to his stiffened fingers, that it could not be removed, and so was buried with him. For many days the soldiers were busied in burying the dead. Deep holes were dug, wherein friends and foes were interred together,—thrown in just as they were found; and when the pit was brim full, the earth was heaped over it. These mounds of death,—fragments of uniform, tatters of tartan and plumage, shakoes and grenadier-caps, scattered about in thousands where the troops were encamped, served very disagreeably to remind them of what might be their own fate on some future day. With the exception of his sash and epaulets, ring and watch, &c., the body of poor Alister lay untouched, and Stuart was deeply moved, at least as much as a hard-hearted campaigner could well be, at the sight of his once merry and brave young comrade's remains. His claymore was grasped in one hand, and his bonnet in the other. The death-shot had passed through his brain, and he had fallen in

the act of cheering on his men. His dark locks were damp with the midnight dew, and a formidable frown contracted his fine bold forehead. He had lain for seven days uninterred, and Ronald prepared to commit his body to the earth. It was rolled in a blanket, while Evan dug a pit three feet deep and six long, in which the corse was deposited.

"Puir Maister Macdonald!" said Evan, as he smoothed down the green sods. "He was a leal true Scotsman and a gallant gentleman: lang it may be ere we see his masik again. He was a gude officer, and well was he loed by every ane."

The other officers were all placed in one grave by the Highlanders, who, according to the ancient Scottish custom, piled a large cairn of loose stones over it. It was situated on the left of the road leading from Maya to France, and probably is yet to be seen. So great was the slaughter among the officers, that Stuart, although a very junior lieutenant, obtained a company, and succeeded his friend Seaton in command of the "light bobs." While the troops lay encamped on the Pyrenees, the different corps were soon made up to their proper strength by the return of convalescents from Vitteria, and the arrival of recruits from the depôts or second battalions at home. In about two months the Highlanders began once more to assume the appearance of a regiment; and Fassifern, and other officers who had been wounded in the fatal action of the 25th July, rejoined as soon as their scars were closed.

Along the chain of heights, strong redoubts and block-houses were placed at intervals. The last were composed of horizontal logs, loop-holed for musketry, and occupied by strong picquets, who were continually on the alert, in case Marshal Soult might again pay them some sudden visit from Gascony. One night in October, Ronald Stuart with his company were on duty in one of these block-houses, when a sudden attack was made on the position by the enemy. There had been a great fall of snow, and the intense cold by which it was accompanied added greatly to the discomfort of the troops encamped on these bleak and lofty mountains, with no other shelter against the inclemencies of the weather, day and night, than canvas tents. The hills and valleys were completely covered to the depth of several feet, and many sentinels were lost, or found dreadfully frost-bitten when dug out. A path had been made from the Maya camp to the block-house which Stuart was to occupy; and as his company marched along the slippery and winding roadway, they often saw Spanish peasants or guerillas lying dead with shovels near them, showing that they perished with the intensity of the cold whilst engaged on some working or fatigue-party. In some places a frozen grisly head, or shrunken hand, clenched and withered, appeared above the smooth white surface of the snow. Had the view around the block-house been in Greenland or Newfoundland, it could not have presented a more dreary aspect. The whole of the Pyrenean chain, and the plains of Bearn and Gascony below, were clad in the same white livery. The sky was of the purest, deepest, and coldest blue, showing the most distant summits of the Pyrenean chain, the white peaks of which rose in long perspective beyond each other in an infinity of outlines. The dense smoke from the camp fires was curling up from amidst the dingy-coloured tents, where now and then the beat of a drum rang out sharply into the clear and frosty air.

Although the cold was intense, and the legs of the Highlanders were as red as their jackets, the sun was shining brightly, and the whole surface of the earth and the atmosphere were sparkling and glittering in his radiance. With their muskets slung and a piper playing before them, the light company trod merrily up the ascent, many of them singing aloud to the notes of the pipe and the tramp of their feet, which sounded dull and

hollow on the hard and frozen path. A captain of the 34th regiment, whom with his company they relieved, left Stuart a flask of brandy, for which he and his two subs (Chisholm and Evan Macpherson) were very thankful, and they found it a considerable acquisition during a winter day and night in a log-house, where the wind went in and out at a hundred chinks and crannies. The picquet-house was internally one large apartment, in the centre of which the soldiers piled their arms, and huddled close together on the ground for mutual heat, and to avoid the cold blast which blew through the numerous open loop-holes in the four walls of the edifice.

Towards night, a soldier of the 66th regiment, muffled up in his grey great-coat, came toiling up the steep ascent from the valley below, bringing to Stuart a letter, which had arrived from Lisbon in the packet for his corps. An officer of the 66th, who was intimate with Ronald, had despatched it to him forthwith, and he knew in an instant, by the handwriting and the crest on the seal, that it came from Alice Lisle. Giving the Englishman a glass of brandy, he desired him to lose no time in regaining his quarters, in case of a snow-storm setting in before nightfall.

If anything would serve to buoy up one's spirits amid all the miseries of campaigning and the dangers of daily warfare, such letters as those of Alice Lisle certainly must have had that effect. After expressing her delight for Stuart's success and safety in a manner and delicacy of style peculiarly her own, she continued thus:—

"And so you are really now a captain, and knight of a military order? O Heaven! I can scarcely believe it, even when your name appears in the army-list. How short a time has elapsed since you used to harry the nests of the eagle and owl at Tullyisla, among the dark nooks of the old castle, and gather flowers and berries with Louis and me in Strathonan! You well know, dear Ronald, that no one rejoices more than Alice Lisle at your rapid promotion, but indeed I think it very horrid to owe one's advancement to the death of one's friends, and I see that a sad alteration has taken place among the officers of the Gordon Highlanders since the battle of the Pyrenees. The joy I now feel in the knowledge of your—alas! only temporary—safety and good fortune, will scarcely counterbalance the agony of mind I experienced when the news of Vittoria arrived, and your name appeared in the list of wounded. Papa concealed the papers from me for some days, but I heard it from my foster-sister, Jessie Cavers, and until your letters, dated from the 'Maya camp' reached us, my anxiety and perturbation of spirit were quite indescribable. What was thought of your danger by the people up the glen at Lochisla I really know not, but the whole country side was in an uproar in honour of the victory. The banner was displayed from the tower, a huge bonfire blazed on the summit of Craigonan, and the two old cannon on the bartizan were kept booming away the live-long night, greatly to the terror of all the old ladies within ten miles, who supposed that Buonaparte in person had come up the Tay, and landed a host of be-whiskered grenadiers on the Inches of Perth. The noise of the cannon alarmed others, too. The militia, the fencibles, and the volunteers got under arms; many of the chiefs north of this began to muster their people, and the whole country was in a state of commotion. Your father gave a dinner to his kin and tenantry, and dancing, drinking, and piping were kept up, I believe, in the old hall until the morning sun shone down the glen upon them."

Rolled up in his cloak, Ronald sat sipping his brandy and water, while by the light of a streaming candle he conned over the letter, so much absorbed in its contents as to forget everything around him, until the

report of a musket, fired by the sentinel outside the block-house, caused him to start and leap to his feet as if he had received an electric shock.

"The French, and in this frosty night!" exclaimed Macpherson, leaping up from the ground, on which he had been fast asleep. "Now the devil confound them! they might have chosen daylight for their visit. Come, Stuart, leave your love-letter,—it can scarcely be anything else, as you have been reading it all night,—leave it, and attend to your command, or Wellington will be issuing such another order anent love-letters as he gave us about the wild-pigs at Alba."

"We receive more reprehensions than rewards from head-quarters, certainly. But where are the French? 'Among the hills?"

"Close by, man!"

"In force, too!" added Chisholm, a smart little sub, who had been watching them from a loop-hole. "There will be heads broken in ten minutes."

"I believe you, my boy," answered Evan Macpherson (a tall fellow, with thick black curly hair and a keen dark eye), as he adjusted his sword-belt. "They are in force enough to put us all to our mettle."

"Stand to your arms, men!" said Ronald; but the order was needless, every man being at his post. "Be bold of heart, my lads!" he added, as he watched the advancing enemy. "We shall soon be succoured."

"Not likely," said Macpherson bluntly, "with all due deference to you, Stuart. Mina, the guerilla chief, with his followers, is far down the mountains, and General Walker's brigade is scarcely within gun-shot; so we may fight till daylight without aid."

"Or till doomsday," retorted Stuart, "if the logs hold together, and the ammunition lasts. Blow, Macvurich," said he to the piper; "give us '*Roderick Mhic Alpain Dubh*,' and blow till the logs shake around us."

The night was clear, the moon shone brightly, and from their loop-holes they saw the French advancing in considerable force,—probably two thousand strong. Their dark figures, enveloped in loose great coats, were seen distinctly dotting the pure white covering of the mountain-side, up the slippery ascent of which they were toiling with infinite labour.

"They are advancing in extended order," observed Stuart, "for fear of our sending them a cannot-shot, probably."

"Which shows they know nothing about our position."

"Certes," said Chisholm, "they are no economists of their persons, to advance upon us over such open ground. They are chasseurs, probably. The moon shines brightly, yet no appointments glitter about them."

"Soult is a most indefatigable fool," said Stuart. "He causes his soldiers to fight needlessly. Poor fellows! they must obey their orders; but what benefit is gained, even if this solitary picquet is cut off? The actions at the Pyrenees and before Pampeluna might have taught the 'Lieutenant of the Emperor' a little experience."

"I dare say," said Macpherson, "they are within range now."

"Well, then, we will enjoy some shooting with them," replied his captain. "Line the loop-holes,—aim steadily; every bullet is worth its weight in gold to-night. They are twenty to one, but care not for that! Help is at hand."

"Get into yer places, lads," said Serjeant Duncan Macrone, "and mind ye ta level low, and gie them ta cauld kail o' Vittoria het again. Got pless us; but this nicht is cauld eneuch ta freeze ta fery Ness."

The discharge of forty muskets almost shook the frail block-house to pieces; and while those soldiers who had fired withdrew to reload, forty others took their places; and thus a rapid and constant fire was maintained against the enemy, blazing around the redoubt and flashing incessantly

from every loop-hole. The summit of the hill was enveloped in clouds of smoke streaked with red fire, and the echoes of the musketry sounded like peals of thunder, booming through the clear atmosphere and echoing among the surrounding peaks. Deadly execution was done among the advancing foe, whose killed and wounded were seen lying prostrate on the frozen snow, and marking the route up the hill by a series of black spots. Nevertheless, although their numbers were diminishing at every step, the main body continued to advance with unabated ardour, formed in a wide half-circle at extended order, returning as well as they could the fire of their adversaries, upon whose place of concealment their shot came every instant, tearing away huge splinters or sinking deep into the stockade with a dull heavy sound; but only a single bullet, during a hot contest of two hours, entered the block-house. It passed through a loop-hole, and wounded a Highlander named Allan Warristoun in the neck, passing through his leather stock, and he sunk on the ground bleeding profusely; but Chisholm attempted to stanch the blood, by dressing the wound as well as circumstances would permit. This was the only casualty that occurred during that night's skirmish, but terrible execution was done among the enemy. They were kept completely at bay, until they became wearied and disheartened by the slaughter made among them. The light-company being excellent marksmen, every shot they fired told fatally on the assailants, at whom they could aim unseen with the utmost coolness and precision. After enduring that sort of work for nearly two hours, they retired with the utmost expedition on perceiving a strong body of Spanish guerillas advancing up the mountains from the village of Roncesvalles. A little farther off was seen the brigade of General Walker, which the noise of the firing had summoned to arms; but their appearance was needless, as the conflict was over.

"Here comes Mina,—the king of Navarre!" exclaimed Stuart, as the great mob of guerillas came rushing up the mountains with shouts of "*Viva Ferdinand!* Long live Spain!" &c. "Cease firing, lads, and let the French retreat. Poor devils! we have mauled them sadly. They are lying as thick as blackberries on the hill-side." In less than half an hour the French had disappeared, and the block-house was surrounded by the bold guerillas, their appetite for blood and plander having been keenly whetted by the report of the musketry.

"Let those who have watches and any loose *pesetas* in their purses, look well to them," said Chisholm, laughing. "Here come the honest soldiers of General Mina, who is said to be often a little upon the *picaro* himself."

"The licht-fingered loon will be waur than ony warlock, gin he gets his neive into my *sporran molloch!*" said Iverach, clasping the fox's mouth of his Highland purse.

"Or mine," said Serjeant Macrone. "Ta will pe gettin' plenty cauld iron, but no a prass podle frae me, Got tam!"

"The bonnets! the bonnets! Gude guide us, look at the blue bonnets!" exclaimed the Highlanders, astonished at the head-dress of the Biscayan guerillas, who wore flat blue caps, like those of the Scottish peasantry. Daylight had now dawned, and withdrawing the barricading from the door of the picquet-house, Stuart issued forth amidst the guerillas, who were busy stripping the French; and long practice had rendered their fingers so nimble, that in ten minutes the numerous bodies lying strewed around the position were, like those at Maya, denuded of every article of clothing. Many of the wounded were also stripped, and perished miserably on the frozen snow. Like all the Spanish peasantry, the guerillas were stout and handsome men, from Guipuscoa, Alava, and Biscaya. Nearly all wore

the *zammarra*, or jacket of black sheep-skin, knee breeches, and *abarcas*, or shoes of hog-skin tied to the feet like sandals. All wore the broad Basque cap, and were armed to the teeth with muskets, pistols, pikes, poniards, and offensive weapons of every kind, which, with their huge whiskers and moustaches, gave them the appearance of a desperate horde of bandits. Their language, the *Lingua Bascongado*, or *Bascuence*, as the Spaniards name it, sounded strange to the ear of Ronald, who had been accustomed to the pure and sonorous language of the Castiles. That of the Basques, according to their own account, existed before the building of the tower of Babel, and was brought into Spain by Jubal,—an assertion somewhat difficult to prove.

Coming from amidst his plundering followers, the celebrated Mina advanced towards Ronald Stuart. His dress was in no way different from that of his followers, save that a pair of gay French epaulets adorned his sheep-skin jacket, and a black ostrich feather floated from the band of his sombrero over his left shoulder. Pasted upon his shoulder-belt was a picture of the Virgin Mary, and a golden image of the same personage hung round his neck. He was accoutred with sword and dagger, and carried a short carbine in his hand, the ammunition for which was in a cartouch-box on his left side, balanced on his right by a copper bugle, for summoning his followers. He had a fine open countenance, of a very mild and prepossessing expression, quite different from what Stuart expected to find in the leader of many thousand guerillas.

The following description (taken from a journal of the period of which I write) will best illustrate his character to the reader. "Espoz y Mina was at this time between twenty and thirty years old, and his frame, both of body and mind, had received the stamp which the circumstances of his country required. When he lies down at night it is always with his pistols in his girdle; and on the few nights that he ever passes under a roof, the door is well secured. Two hours' sleep is sufficient for him. When his shirt is dirty, he goes to the nearest house, and changes it with the owner for a clean one. He makes his own powder in a cave among the mountains, and has his hospital in a mountain village, which the French have repeatedly attempted to surprise, but always unsuccessfully, for the hearts of the whole country are with Mina. He receives intelligence of every movement of the enemy, and on the first tidings of danger the villagers carry the sick and wounded upon litters on their shoulders into the fastnesses, where they remain in perfect security till the baffled enemy retires. The alcaldes of every village, when they are ordered by the French to make any requisition, must instantly inform Mina; if they fail in this duty, he goes himself in the night, seizes them in their beds, and shoots them."

Although not above five-and-twenty, the hard service he had seen, in this irregular mode of warfare, made him seem much older. Mina was the idol of the Spanish people, who styled him the king of Navarre, and extolled his deeds beyond those of the Cid, or the most famous knights of Spanish chivalry and romance. Mina was a true patriot, and the Hoffer of the Spaniards. Although his guerillas were well drilled, and consisted of ten or twelve battalions, which he ruled with a rod of iron, he never restrained them from plundering the French. On his approach, Ronald raised his bonnet in greeting the great guerilla chief, for though he was originally but a humble farmer of Pampeluna, yet Francisco Mina had the heart of a hero, and was brave as a lion.

"*Senor Capitan*," said he, bowing profoundly, after the most approved Spanish manner, "we have been somewhat late in coming to your rescue; but the fire of your soldiers has told superbly, and the base *ladrones* lie here pretty thick. The old proverb should be changed to—"the more

French, the more gain for us."* However, I never put my own hands to a man after he is dead; the plunder I leave to my followers,—'tis all their pay, poor fellows! and Our Lady del Pilar knows that they earn it hard."

"A mode of payment I very little admire," said Stuart with a smile. "But I trust, Senor Francisco, that your people will see them buried after this unharnessing is over?"

"*Satanas* seize us if we bury a hair of their heads!" exclaimed the guerilla vehemently. "Pho! Senor Cavalier, you forget yourself. They are only Frenchmen; and what say the priests every day,—'Love all mankind *but* Frenchmen, who are the spawn of hell!' They lie under the ban of his holiness the Pope, and with this excuse three hundred unfrocked friars serve in my band,—and brave fellows they are as ever grasped hilt! But as for the soldiers of the Corsican tyrant, they may feast the wolves of the mountains or the birds of the air, for aught that Mina cares about the matter."

He now unslung a huge leathern flask of *aguardiente* from his sash, and after giving Stuart and his subs each a draught, he handed the rest to Serjeant Macrone, to distribute among the light company. Macrone gave his best bow, and carried off the flask, with many a wish that "Got might pless her honour's ainsel, and gie her lots o' ta sneeshin and ta gude Ferintosh!" To the good wishes of Macrone, Mina replied only by a stare, without comprehending a syllable. He next gave some cigars to each of the officers, saying, at the same time, it was no compliment to present them with what cost him nothing, one of his guerillas having found them in a Frenchman's havresack.

"But they are prime cigars, senores, and from the manufactory at Guadalaxara, in Mexico," said he, lighting one adroitly by means of flashing powder in the pan of one of his pistols. "Excellent!" continued he, puffing away with an air of satisfaction which would have driven the royal author of the "Counter-blaste" to his wit's-end. "Excellent, indeed, *par Diez!* And I ought to be a judge, senores, having smoked some hundred thousands in my time; and though but a poor peasant, who dug the earth and planted cabbages at Pampeluna, I am descended in a direct line from the noble cavalier Don Hernandez de Toledo, who, in 1559, introduced the famous leaf into Europe, from the province of Tabaca, in San Domingo."

"Truly, Senor Espoz y Mina, your worthy ancestor deserves the gratitude of his countrymen," said Chisholm, in a tone of raillery. "He contrived a very agreeable amusement for them. From day-dawn till sunset they do little else than draw smoke into their mouths, and watch it curling out again."

Mina fixed his keen dark eye with a glance of displeasure upon Chisholm's good-natured countenance, but made no reply to him.

"Juan de la Roca!" cried he, in a voice like thunder, while he struck his foot impatiently on the frozen snow.

"Senor?" answered a childish voice; and a tall Spanish boy about sixteen years of age stood before him. This mere child fought in the band of Mina. He was esteemed the bravest among them, and always led their advanced guard, and his name had been blazoned forth in all the *Gacetas* of the country.

"Bring the spy before us."

The boy, Juan de la Roca, who was armed like his comrades with pistols and carbine, dragged forward a peasant, whose arms were bound with

* A very old Spanish proverb, still universally current in Spain, says, "The more Moors, the more gain."

cords behind him. The poor wretch trembled violently when the proud stern eye of Mina fell upon him.

"This is a notorious spy, senores," said he, "whom we captured on our way up the mountains. Now, *Senor Picaro*, what have you to say that you should not die?"

The spy never raised his eyes, and maintained a dogged silence.

"Brand him, Juan!" exclaimed Mina. "Place the mark of Cain upon his forehead, that every true Spaniard may shun, abhor, and shrink from him!"

The young savage, whom practice had rendered expert at the operation, unsheathed his dagger, and cut off the ear of the captive, from whom a deep imprecation escaped. Juan then thrust into the picquet-fire in the block-house, an iron brand, just such as those used for marking barrels, &c. It bore the words "VIVA MINA!" in letters half an inch square. Four powerful guerillas grasped the head of the spy, holding him so that it was impossible he could move. When the brand was red-hot La Roca pressed it upon his brow, the flesh of which was roasted and scorched, under the terrible operation, in a moment. The miserable being writhed and shrieked in agony. He burst from his torturers, and buried his face in the snow; then starting up with the yell of a fiend he rushed down the mountains like a madman, and disappeared.

"Now, senores," said Mina, "I have inflicted upon him a punishment worse than death, because these marks can never be effaced. I mark every traitor thus, that my countrymen may know and despise them. Those who are thus branded are ashamed to look a Spaniard in the face, and, being compelled to dwell in solitary places, are often found dead of want among the mountains. But I must now make my adieus, and return to Roncesvalles, where my five thousand followers are to be reviewed to-day, by Lord Wellington and General Morillo."

He blew a blast on his horn to collect his people, and taking farewell of the *Capitan de Cazadores* (as he named Stuart), withdrew in the direction of the famous pass of Roncesvalles, leaving the bodies of the French lying stripped to the skin amidst the snow. As soon as they had departed, Stuart ordered out the light company with shovels, to entomb the bodies; but so deep was the snow, that temporary graves in its frail substance only could be given, as there was not time to dig down to reach the earth. Many were found on the point of death, the intense cold finishing what the bullet had begun, and their gravediggers had to await, shovel in hand, the moment of dissolution; after which they buried, and heaped the snow hurriedly over them. But a thaw came a short time before the position on the heights was abandoned, and the remains of the unfortunates were again exposed, and at a time when no interment could be given them, as the British forces were on the march to invade the "sacred territory" of *la belle France*.

The success of Sir Thomas Graham at San Sebastian, which he boldly won by storm on the 31st of August, the fall of Pampeluna, which on the 31st of October surrendered to Don Carlos de Espana, and the successful passage of the Bidassoa, infused the highest ardour into the heart of every soldier in the allied army, and every regiment longed to unfurl its triumphant banners to the winds of France. Although the French maintained their ancient renown in arms by fighting to the last, yet they were driven from all their intrenched camps on the Lower Pyrenees, and combating every rood of ground, retired on the 16th of November to the left bank of the Nive, and there encamped, after blowing up the bridge to prevent the British crossing the river, which at that time was swollen to thrice its usual size by the melting of the snow on the hills, and by a long continuance of rain.

The allies encamped on the Spanish side of the river, and hostilities ceased for a time. The Gordon Highlanders occupied the French village of Cambo, in the department of the Lower Pyrenees, and close to the river Nive. Its inhabitants had all fled on the advance of the allies, crossing to the left bank with the retiring forces of their emperor. The camps and bivouacs of the French lay close to those of their enemies, divided only by the narrow space of the river, and the sentries on each side were but ten or fifteen yards distant from each other. From dawn until sunset the French serjeants were heard continually drilling their squads of conscripts, twenty thousand of whom Buonaparte had dragged away from their quiet homes, and marched to the Nive to be drilled in the view of that veteran army, which had driven the flower of the soldiers of France from one end of the Peninsula to the other. Day after day the French non-commissioned officers were seen, cane in hand, getting the poor peasant-boys into some state of discipline. The British used to crowd to the river's edge to view the novel sight of French regiments on their parade, and beholding them go through the *maniement des armes*, or manual exercise, with all the minuteness common to the French,—the adjutant giving, after every word of command, the continual cautions, "*un, deux, trois, quatre!*"

At one part, where the river was very narrow, a soldier of the 3rd Buffs, when on sentry one day, found himself immediately opposite to a French grenadier, placed on the same duty on the left bank of the river. The Gaul was a rough-whiskered fellow, wearing the usual service-like great-coat, red epaulets, and high fur-cap of the Imperial Guard. The sentinels had been staring steadily at each other for some time; and the Buff, who had begun to imagine the face of the Frenchman was not unknown to him, was considerably astonished to hear him ask the question,—

"Well, Tom, old fellow! How are the dirty old Buffs coming on?" This rogue was a comrade of his own, who, a year or two before, had deserted to the enemy, and had the cool impudence to hail his old friend thus from the French side of the Nive.

On the evening of the 8th of November, the weather being remarkably fine, the French officers sent their bands to the river-side, to play for the entertainment of the British, and many courtesies were interchanged; flasks of wine and bunches of fruit were tossed over by the French, who, avoiding military topics, conversed with soldier-like frankness on other subjects. Ronald took the opportunity to inquire after his old acquaintance, Captain de Mesmai, and was informed that his regiment, the 10th Cuirassiers, was stationed at St. Jean de Luz, near Bayonne. A young officer of *chasseurs à cheval* said he hoped the British passed their time pleasantly amid the gaieties of Cambo, and with the fair dames of that beautiful city. Stuart replied in the same tone of raillery, that the French ladies had all retired with their countrymen, at the sight of the scarlet coats: an answer which evidently piqued monsieur.

In exchange for some London newspapers, containing the despatches of Lord Wellington, detailing the victory of Vittoria, an old major, wearing a dozen medals on his breast, threw across the river a bundle of Parisian *Moniteurs*, containing the false and very contradictory despatches of King Joseph on the same affair. Some Spanish journals, the *Gaceta de la Regencia*, and the *Gaceta de Valencia*, they refused to receive, and politely returned. Between deadly enemies, intercourse such as this renders war at once noble and chivalric. By it the heart of the stemest soldier becomes again humanized, and the barbarities incident to his profession are lessened and mitigated.

On the same evening, a remarkable circumstance occurred about a mile above Cambo. A French guard were about to kill a bullock for their su-

tions; but the animal broke loose, and plunging into the stream, swam to the British side, and fell among a picquet of the Gordon Highlanders, commanded by Chisholm. By them it was instantly shot, flayed, and cut up; and all were rejoicing in expectation of a savoury meal, when a French soldier, with a white handkerchief displayed on the point of his sword, forded the river; advancing to the picquet, he craved, in the name of his comrades, that the flesh might be divided,—adding, that surely *les Ecossais* would not deprive brothers of the sword of the only meal chance had given them for two days. It was impossible to refuse. Two other soldiers arrived, and they were sent back laden with half the carcase, and their canteens filled with wine, for which the poor fellows seemed very grateful; and one returned, presenting the thanks and compliments of their officer to Chisholm for his kindness.* The officers of each army spent the evening in conversing across the river, laughing and jesting like old friends; and when it grew dark, with many adieus they parted,—to meet on the next morning with their swords in their hands.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHATELET.

I MUST now present the reader with a change of scene, or at least of adventures, in describing those of Louis Lisle; who, after having been severely wounded in the arm by the sword of De Mesmai, was carried off a prisoner from the skirmish of Fuente Duenna. With a few hundred other captives, gleaned up on different occasions, he had been confined within the strong fortress of Pampeluna until the French army retired beyond it, when, with his comrades in misfortune, he was sent into France and placed in a solitary stronghold on the left bank of the Nive, a few miles from the village of Cambo. This was a gloomy old feudal fortress, the property of the Duke of Alba de T——, who has already figured in preceding chapters. It consisted of a high square keep, a few flanking towers, and a high wall, embattled along the top; and every means had been taken to strengthen the place by stockades, loop-holes, cannon, &c. The garrison consisted of two or three companies of the 105th French regiment of the line. Louis, who had been heartily tired of his residence in Pampeluna, was but little pleased when he beheld the gloomy château, as the body of prisoners, with an escort of French lancers, marched up the ascent leading to it.

It was on a dark and louring November morning, when the black towers, the grey palisades, the gloomy court, and muffled-up sentinels appeared more sombre in the dull red light of the sun, which, like a crimson globe, seemed resting on the eastern summits of the Pyrenees, and struggling to show its face through the masses of dun clouds which floated across the sky. The tri-coloured standard of the emperor was drooping on the summit of the keep, and the guard were under arms as the prisoners entered the gate. These consisted principally of Spaniards and Portuguese; there were a few British soldiers, but Louis was the only officer,—and a very discontented one he seemed, as he looked forward with considerable repugnance to a long imprisonment in France.

As they halted and formed line in the court of the fortress, Lisle was

* An occurrence, almost the same as here stated, happened with the same regiment at the lines of Torres Vedras, in 1810.

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somewhat surprised to hear himself accosted in Spanish by an officer, who, muffled in a large military cloak, came from the keep. He recognised his friend of Aranjuez, the father of Donna Virginia,—the same traitorous Spanish noble who now openly served Buonaparte; and, as commandant of a French garrison, wore a staff-uniform embroidered with oak-leaves. Lisle thought of Virginia,—indeed he never thought of aught else: and veiling his dislike to the duke, he answered him as politely as possible. He would fain have asked after the fair donna, but feared to arouse the keen and ready suspicions of the proud and pompous Spaniard, while so completely within his power. The duke behaved to him coldly but courteously; and, after receiving his parole of honour that he would not transgress the bounds of the châtelet, invited him to dinner, and retired.

Louis was now his own master, with leave to perambulate as much as he chose the court-yard and palisades of the out-works, while the sentries from every nook and corner kept sharp eyes upon him, and often, when he attempted to pass their posts, barred the way with ported arms, and saying, "Pardon me, monsieur, you must not pass;" but with a softness of tone and politeness of manner, very different from what those of a British sentinel would be on a similar occasion.

The hours passed slowly away, and Louis began to feel very disconsolate, and very impatient of the monotony and restraint of a prisoner's life, forming as it did so strong a contrast to the heart-stirring excitement of campaigning. As it was contrary to their orders, the sentinels could not converse with him, and in truth his French was none of the best; so he passed the time in sauntering dismally about until the sun began to verge westward, and he knew that the dinner-hour was approaching. In the meantime, he whiled away the hours as well as he could, by whistling a march, humming a waltz, or tossing pebbles and fragments of lime from the ramparts to raise circles and bubbles in the Nive, which swept round an angle of the rocks on which the fortress stood. These employments he varied by watching with an intense interest the distant Pyrenees, in hopes to see the far away glitter of arms announce the approach of the allies, whose troops he knew to be in that direction. The eagerness of his glance towards Spain did not escape the observation of messieurs the sentries of the 105th; and they twirled their moustaches and regarded each other with a truly French smile of hauteur and complaisance, as they strode briskly to and fro on their posts; and one young man, pointing towards the Lower Pyrenees, remarked to him significantly with a smile, "*Ce pays sent la poudre à canon, monsieur!*"*

About four o'clock in the afternoon (an early hour in 1813) dinner was announced, and Lisle was ushered into an ancient hall, roofed with oak and floored with stone, but in no way very magnificent. There he was received by the duke and his daughter, Virginia, who, having heard of her *friend's* arrival, was dressed with unusual care to receive him; her woman had been occupied two good hours in arranging the massive braids of her glossy hair in a way to please their coquettish owner. A few officers of the French regiment were present, and Louis could have dispensed with their presence very well. He felt jealous at the very sight of them, as they were all handsome fellows, chevaliers of the Legion and many other orders. Besides, a Frenchman makes love as no other man does, and a douce Scot is certainly no match for him in volubility of words and laughter. There was a Spaniard present, who, although not greatly gifted with personal attractions, appeared to pay so much attention to Virginia, that Lisle cursed him in his heart for his impudence, and began to form plans for calling him to a severe account for his presumption.

* Literally, "this place, or country, smells of gunpowder, sir."

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Like the duke, this unworthy hidalgo was a renegade, and had been created by Joseph Buonaparte Count of Aranjuez, and Colmenare de Orija, and knight of the Stole,—an ancient order instituted by the kings of Arragon. He greeted Lisle coldly enough. They had met before at Aranjuez, where he bore the name of Felix Joaquin, of the order of Calatrava; for true Spaniards refused to acknowledge the titles he bore from the usurper's hand. The donna behaved with the same affability to him as to the other guests, being unwilling to let him perceive that she understood his attentions; but the delight of Louis at again beholding her and conversing with her, was clouded by chagrin and anger. He soon became aware that the open and intrusive attentions of the *ci-devant* condé were licensed by the approbation of the old duke.

The dinner passed over quietly enough. Military matters were avoided by all but one little Gascon major, who found it impossible to refrain from detailing to Lisle, with evident exultation, an account of Soult's forcing the passes of Maya and Roncesvalles on the 25th July,—affairs from which, if the numerical force on each side is considered, but very little honour accrues to France. Encouraged by the applause of his own officers, who were evidently quizzing him, the little Gascon entertained the company with an account of his own particular exploits at Maya, where, by his own tale, he had three horses shot under him. One anecdote did not fail to interest Lisle. He stated, that on a party of a Scots regiment *(sans culottes)*, who hurled large stones on the 105th, he took terrible vengeance, by mounting the rock, which they possessed, and putting them to death with his own hand!

"*Sacre!*" said he, as he concluded, "*Sauve qui peut* was the word; but not one of the fierce *sans culottes* escaped!"

Donna Virginia said she would excuse the major his ungenerous triumph, as she believed these were the greatest victories the French had ever won in Spain. The duke frowned; the count would have done so too, had gallantry permitted him; the little major looked big, and twirled up his moustaches; while his subs, like well-bred cavaliers, laughed, as in duty bound, at the young lady's retort. On Lisle inquiring for Donna Olivia, Virginia blushed, and tears glittered in her dark eyes; while her father replied coldly that she had retired to a convent in Galicia, but did not add that it was to the *monasterio de los Arrepentidas*, he had so ruthlessly consigned her.

As soon as dinner was over, Virginia withdrew, and cigars, wine, and gaming-tables were introduced. The duke and his intended son-in-law sat down to chess, at which they were as great enthusiasts as the celebrated Don Pedro Carrera* himself, while the Frenchmen took to trictrac, and quickly became absorbed in all the mystery of *tour à bas—tour d'une*, &c. &c.; but Lisle, who had neither money nor inclination to gamble, begged to be excused, and withdrew, receiving as he retired a keen glance from the count, to whom he replied by another of contempt, for rivals soon discover each other. Louis again returned to his solitary promenade on the lower works of the fortress, and continued to pace among the cannon and pyramids of shot which lined the stockades, until he heard his name called, and by a voice which he should have known amongst ten thousand. "Luiz! Don Luiz!"

"Virginia!" cried he; and springing to the grated loop at the base of the keep, he kissed the little hand she extended towards him.

"Retire now, senor," said she.

* A Spaniard, who in 1617 published a treatise on the origin of chess, carrying its antiquity back to the era of the Trojan war.

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"Ah, why so soon?" said Louis. "But you must not *senor* me,—it sounds so distant."

"*Mi querida*, then."

"Ah! that is better. Dear Virginia!" and he kissed her hand again. It was indeed such a hand as one would never tire of holding. So tiny, and so delicate,—and set off by the handsome black bracelet round the slender wrist. "Why would you leave me so soon, Virginia?" said he, gazing on her beautiful Spanish features. "It is long,—very long since we last met!"

"Only a few months, Luiz; and yet the time does appear very long. But we may be observed; these sharp-sighted French *soldados* keep guard on every nook and corner, and my father may hear that I have met you."

"He is busy over the chess-board; and no Frenchman would spoil pleasure such as ours."

"I must indeed leave you. Alas! I am not so free here as at pleasant Aranjuez."

"Hear me, before you go,—but one word, Virginia?"

"Well, then,—one only."

"Who is this Don Felix,—this Count of Aranjuez?"

"You have spoken a dozen, and broken your covenant."

"Who is he?"

"One of whom we had better beware. He is no more a count than the *tambour* passing yonder with his drum on his back; but he is as false at heart as ever was Rodriguez, or the Counts of Carrion."

"He is very attentive to you."

"He is very troublesome,—*Santa Maria!* a perfect nuisance. But my father favours him, and as his wrath is terrible, I am forced to dissemble. But, ah! retire now, Don Luiz, I beseech you!"

Don Luiz was too much enraptured and bewildered to obey; and putting in his arm, he encircled and drew her close to the bars of the loop-hole, through which he pressed his glowing lip to her own. She yielded to him passively.

"O senor!"

"Senor again! Ah! these infernal bars, Virginia," he exclaimed. But releasing herself from his grasp, she glided away with the lightness of a fairy, and he saw her no more that night. But there was something so delightful in being near Virginia, and living under the same roof with her, that his feelings underwent an entire change before night closed in, and he looked less anxiously towards the distant positions of Lord Wellington's army on the Pyrenees, and the aspect of his prison appeared less dismal and desolate. The presence of Virginia cast a halo over everything; and new feelings, of love, hope, and pleasure began to dawn in his heart.

They met daily, almost hourly indeed, because in the narrow compass of a fortress or barrack, people encounter each other at every turn and corner; and some weeks passed away with a pleasure to Louis, which nothing seemed to cloud but the chance that Marshal Soult might order the prisoners in the château to be conveyed farther into the interior of the country, as vague rumours were afloat that the allied army was about to descend from the mountains and invade France. It was only from the casual observations of the French officers, at whose mess he often dined, that Lisle was able to gather any political intelligence, but that something warlike was expected appeared evident. The garrison of the château was strengthened by a company of chasseurs, additional works were erected, and scarcely a day passed without French troops being seen on the march southward; and it was only when Lisle beheld the clouds of dust and flash of steel appearing on the distant roads, that he felt himself indeed a pri-

sonner, and all the disagreeable nature of his situation came vividly upon his mind. But again he thought of Virginia, and remembered that a single smile or a soft word from her were well worth all the gloss and glitter of parade, the enthusiasm, the excitement, and the glory of warfare.

Being the only officer among the prisoners, he always dined with the duke, or at the temporary mess of the French. He preferred the former, to be near Virginia, upon whom the *ci-devant* count kept a jealous eye,—the penetration of which it required all the young lady's art to baffle; while, at the same time, it required all her politeness and good nature to enable her to submit to his attentions, which were now becoming, as she often declared to Louis, "quite odious and insufferable." Her cavalier longed to horsewhip the Spanish traitor for his presumption, and on more than one occasion would have given him a morning's airing,—in other words, have "called him out," but for fear of an *exposé*, which he would rather avoid.

Besides, he had a deeper plot laid, and another object in view. He knew that Virginia dreaded the duke for his stern austerity, as much as he himself despised him for his treason and falsehood to his native country; and he hoped by overcoming her scruples, and prevailing upon her to consent to a secret marriage, at once to free her from the insolent perseverance of Don Felix Joaquin and the authority of her father. He had resolved to await some change of circumstances, such as the removal of the whole garrison farther into France, or its being strenthened by the arrival of more troops, as the revengeful dispositions of the duke and Joaquin were to be dreaded while he remained so much at their mercy as his situation of prisoner within the narrow limits of the châtelet placed him. The near approach of the allies had rendered the extension of his parole impossible; but he soon learned that further delay with time or circumstances was fraught with danger, and that if he did not at once secure the hand of Virginia, he might lose it for ever.

With a countenance indicative of much discomposure, and eyes red with weeping, she appeared one evening at the grated loop-hole, where they usually had a meeting alone after dusk. She had just come from an interview with the duke, who being resolved to carry to the utmost the authority assumed by Spanish papas, had abruptly commanded her to come to a final arrangement with the mercenary condé, or prepare to join her sister in the *monasterio*. Louis, who had been long wavering in his plans, was at once decided by this information. He prevailed upon her to consent to an elopement, and have that ceremony performed which would place her beyond the power of her father and the views of Don Felix. To taking such a step, a Spanish damsel has always felt less scruples than a British, and with abundance of tears, fears, agitation, &c., the donna gave her consent, and Lisle retired to arrange matters. The greatest difficulty was the confounded parole of honour, which tied him to the château.

In this dilemma he applied to his rival, the count, requesting him to procure leave for him to visit Saint Palais for a day or two, pledging himself solemnly to return within the given time. The Spaniard, although detesting Louis Lisle in his heart, offered readily to befriend him on this occasion—having two ends in view; first, to remove Lisle from the presence of Virginia; and, secondly, to do so effectually, by sending him to his long home by means of some of those continental assassins, whose daggers are ever at the service of the highest bidder. Through his interest the duke granted the leave, and long before break of day Louis and the donna were clear of the fortress,—the duke's written order satisfying the scruples of the sub commanding the barrier-guard. At a village inn hard by they procured horses, and took the road direct for Cambo, where they hoped to find the

curé of the village. The wily count had previously despatched two of his own servants, Valencians,—rogues who would have sold their chance of salvation for a maravedi,—to post themselves in ambush on the road leading to Saint Palais, whither he believed Lisle to have gone, with orders to shoot him dead the moment he appeared.

So full of joy was Don Felix at the expected revenge, that he found it impossible to retire to rest, and continued to pace his chamber all night. With the utmost exultation he heard the noise of his intended victim's departure in the morning, while it was yet dark, and long ere gun-fire. As the challenge of the sentinels and clang of the closing gate echoed through the silent fortress the satisfaction of the Spaniard increased, and he already imagined himself the master of Virginia's broad lands on the Nive, and her rich estates in Valentia, *la Hermosa;* and long he watched the road to Saint Palais, in hopes of seeing the death-shot gleam through the darkness.

An hour elapsed, and he felt certain that the victim must have fallen into the deadly snare; but his anxiety to behold the completion of his plot would not permit him to delay an instant longer. Ordering a soldier of the guard to saddle his horse, he stuck his pistols into his girdle, drew his hat over his eyes, and muffling himself in his mantle, he rode forth,—feeling the exhilarating influence of a gallop in the breezy morning air infinitely agreeable, after a night of feverish excitement and drinking in his close chamber. As he approached the spot where he had placed the assassins in ambush, he hid his face in his mantle, and rode more slowly forward, with a beating heart, scanning the roadway in expectation of seeing the corse of his rival stretched upon it. But he looked in vain! The winding road between the thickets was clear, and appeared so for many a mile beyond. Enraged to a pitch of madness at the idea of his escape, he dashed the rowels into his horse and galloped on; when lo! two carbines flashed from adjacent thickets,—one on each side of the way. A sudden exclamation of rage and agony escaped from him; his horse reared up wildly, and, pierced by a two-ounce bullet, the worthy Count of Aranjuez and Colmenare de Orija, knight of Calatrava and the Stole, &c. &c. fell to the earth, and almost instantly expired.

While Don Felix fell thus into his own snare, his more fortunate rival, with Donna Virginia, galloped along the bank of the Nive, pursuing the road to Cambo, where they arrived about sunrise, and sought without delay the house, or rather the cottage, of the village pastor. There fresh obstacles arose, as the reverend gentleman pretended to have many conscientious scruples about wedding a Catholic lady to a Briton and a heretic. But a few gold Napoleons overcame his qualms, and he consented to perform the important ceremony, with a description of which it is needless to tire the reader. Louis had no ordinary task to accomplish, in soothing the hesitation and terrors of Virginia, who was—

> "Crimsoned with shame, with terror mute,
> Dreading alike escape, pursuit;
> Till love, victorious o'er alarms,
> Hid fears and blushes in his arms."

There were no witnesses to the ceremony, so important to Louis and his bride, save a stout villager and his wife, who declared that Donna Virginia's black veil and velvet mantilla were contrary to all rule and established custom, as white drapery, pure as the virgin snow, and a coronet of white flowers and orange-buds, formed the bridal garb in France. But there was no help for it, and the donna became the Honourable Mrs. Lisle, in her high comb, braided hair, and long black veil, which swept the ground. Louis now remembered his father, whose existence he had almost forgotten in the excitement of the elopement; but he well knew that his indulgent

relative would pardon the hasty union, considering the circumstances which urged it, and he longed for the time when he should present to him, and to his sister Alice, his beautiful Virginia, who, although the daughter of a traitor, was descended from one of the noblest houses in Old Castile.

The bride was too much agitated to return immediately to the château, and to encounter the wrath of that terrible old don her father, and so they remained that night at the cottage of the pastor of Cambo.

Early next morning Louis was aroused from the couch of his bride by the sound of French drums, near the village. He heard them rattling away at *la bats de la rétraite* (the retreat); then succeeded the "long roll," a sound which never fails to rouse a soldier. The noise of distant firing was heard, and he sprung from the side of the blushing and trembling Virginia, and threw open the casement. It was a beautiful morning: the sun shone brightly, and the birds chirped merrily; the dew was gleaming like silver from the branches of the leafless trees; the sky was clear and blue, and the bold outlines of the Pyrenees were seen stretching far away in the distance towards Passages and Bayonne. Dense columns of French infantry were crowding in confusion along the road which led to the bridge of Cambo, while the sharp-shooters of the advancing allies, hovering on their rear and flanks, kept up an irregular but destructive fire, which their chasseurs, who lined every wall and hedge, endeavoured to return.

Lisle saw that there was no time to be lost, if he would return to the château. The discomfited French were pouring across the bridge of Cambo, where a detachment of *sapeurs* were busy at work, undermining one of the piers. The main body of the allies were already in sight. The green and scarlet uniforms of the light infantry were seen at intervals, appearing and disappearing as they leaped from bush to hedge, and from hedge to wall, firing, and then lying flat on their faces to reload, and avoid the fire of the enemy. Mingled with other sharp-shooters, he beheld the light company of his own regiment, and knew their tall green and black plumes as they floated on the morning wind. Wistfully did Lisle look towards them; and it was with no ordinary feelings of chagrin that he beheld his friends so near, and yet found himself under the disagreeable necessity of returning to the château, where he should be exposed to the insults and vengeance of an intractable old Spaniard, to whom he now stood in the relation of son-in-law.

Virginia, who was excessively terrified by the noise of the firing, which was now heard around Cambo on all sides, and not less alarmed at the rage and disorder which prevailed among the retreating French, with tears and caresses besought Louis to remain unseen in the little cottage of the curate, until the allies gained possession of the village. But that resolve was impossible. His word was pledged to her father, and he must return—even at the risk of certain death. He prepared without delay to cross the river. On entering the stable to caparison their horses, he found that the worthy pastor had decamped in the night, taking them with him, and everything of any value,—leaving only a stubborn old mule. Venting a bitter malediction on the thief, Lisle tied a halter to the long-eared steed, and led him forth into the yard, just as the gate was dashed open by the French, whose rear-guard had commenced plundering and destroying the houses, to leave no shelter to the allies, who were now become invaders of France.

On beholding his red uniform and plumed bonnet, two charged him with their bayonets, which he had barely time to parry with a hay-fork that he hurriedly snatched up. They called upon him to surrender, and he found himself in imminent peril. Virginia was crying aloud from the interior of

the cottage for aid, which it was impossible to yield her, as he was hemmed against the bayonets of a dozen soldiers. From this disagreeable predicament he was relieved by the interference of an officer, who exclaiming, "*Redressez vos armes, messieurs!*" struck down their bayonets with his sabre, and compelled them to retire. He then asked Louis, sternly, how he came there. Louis informed him, as briefly and as well as his imperfect knowledge of French would permit, that he was a prisoner of war on his parole of honour, and was only desirous of crossing the Nive with the French forces. He prayed the Frenchman, as an officer and *gentilhomme*, to rescue the lady, who was now crying aloud for assistance. The officer sheathed his sabre, and rushing into the cottage among the soldiers who thronged it, returned in a minute with Virginia, who was all tears and agitation, leaning on his right arm, while, with true French politeness, he carried his weather-beaten cocked-hat under his left. He relieved poor Lisle from a state of dreadful suspense, by placing her under his protection. She was nearly terrified out of her senses; and that she might not be subjected to further insult, the officer ordered a *caporal brèveté*, with a file of soldiers, to attend them as a guard.

Under their friendly escort, Louis at once prepared to leave the village, which was now enveloped in flames and smoke, and involved in tumult and uproar, while the bullets of the British riflemen came whistling every second among the crowded streets and blazing rafters. Placing Virginia upon the mule, which the honest curate had left behind him as worthless, Louis led it by the bridle, and pressing into the ranks of the French, crossed the bridge, which was no sooner cleared than the *sapeurs* sprung the mine, and it was reduced to ruins in a moment. The firing now ceased, the rapid and swollen state of the Nive rendering pursuit impossible; and Louis, as he looked back towards Cambo, beheld his own brigade leisurely entering it,—marching along the highway, in close column of subdivisions; but they were soon hidden in the smoke of the village, which was enveloping in a white cloud the whole southern bank of the river. Continuing to lead by the bridle the mule upon which Virginia rode, Louis returned to the château, where all was bustle and warlike preparation. The works were bristling with bayonets, the guns were all shotted, and the lighted matches smoked beside them. The chasseurs and the two companies of the 105th were under arms, and the little major was bustling up and down, ordering, directing, and quarrelling with all and each; while his commandant, the duke, looked sullenly around him, scanning through a telescope the advance of the allies.

The death of the count was as yet unknown,—the assassins, on discovering their mistake, having plundered and concealed the body, after which they absconded, and were no more heard of for a time. Such was the posture of affairs when Lisle entered the court of the place, where cannon-shot, bomb-shells, and casks of ammunition, lay strewed about in confusion. He had scarcely reached the spot, when he became aware that a scene of high dramatic interest was about to be enacted. He was rudely seized by two soldiers with their swords drawn, while the duke at the same moment violently dragged his daughter from her saddle, ere Lisle could raise a hand to free her from his grasp. So bitterly was he enraged, that the stern reproaches he hurled against the affrighted and sinking Virginia, and the fierce menaces against Louis, were for some time totally incoherent.

"False *picaro!* I will have your heart thrown to my dogs for this!" he exclaimed, gazing at Louis with an eye of vindictive fury. "And as for *you*, most *gracios senora*, you shall join your sister in the monasterio at Galicia."

"Stay, my lord!" interposed Lisle, becoming violently excited; "you somewhat over-rate your authority in this matter. She is no longer under your control, and so unhand her instantly! Come to me, Virginia! You are my wedded wife, and no human power can separate us now." The reply of the fierce Spaniard was a deadly thrust at Louis with his sword. Some fatal work would have ensued, had not the little major struck aside the blade, and desired him to remember that the laws of war must be respected, and that Monsieur Lisle was a prisoner of France. Louis's blood boiled within him, while poor Virginia covered her face with her hands, and shrieked aloud to behold her husband and father glaring at each other with eyes of fire, until by the command of the latter she was borne away to her chamber in the keep.

"*Demonios!* major, how did you dare to stay my hand?" asked he, turning furiously to the Frenchman.

"*Parbleu, monsieur le duc!*"

"Do you suppose I will ever permit the honour of my long-descended house to be stained by the pretensions of a base and degenerate fool? a nameless Briton, *par Diez!*"

"Proud Spaniard!" replied Louis, resentment glowing in his cheek and kindling in his eye; "my ancestry were not less splendid than your own; but mine is the degradation, in allying myself with a traitor like you, who has abandoned his king and country to serve under the banner of a savage invader! But the virtues of such a woman as Virginia might redeem your whole race from perdition."

"*Parbleu!*" said the major again.

"And recollect, gentlemen and soldiers," continued Lisle, "that if I am maltreated by any within these walls, you may all smart for it yet. See you, sirs, the allies are close at hand, driving the boasting soldiers of the Emperor before them as the wind drives the mist, and the whole of Gascony will be theirs before another sun sets."

"*Présomption et vanité!*" said the major, turning up his eyes and shrugging his shoulder. "*Aha! Les Français sont au fait du métier de la guerre de terre!*" And many officers of the 105th, who crowded round, laughed heartily, and observed, that probably in a week or two the allies would be flying for shelter across the Pyrenees. Lisle blessed his stars that the garrison was not composed entirely of Spaniards; for, assuredly, the duke would have slain him on the spot but for the firm interference of the French officers. He was, however, put under close arrest, and a sentinel placed over him. The place in which he was confined was a projecting turret of the outworks, and there he was left to his own reflections, which were none of the most agreeable. He found himself acting the part of a romantic hero, but certainly little to his own satisfaction. In the same turret was confined a genuine Teague, a soldier of the 88th regiment, who had been placed in durance for two desperate attempts to escape when the allies appeared in sight. Mister Paddy Mulroony was seated very composedly in a corner, smoking a black pipe about an inch long, while in his cunning but good-natured face was seen that droll curl of the mouth and keen twinkling of the eye, which are so decidedly Irish.

"Och, tearin' murder! this is a poor case, indeed," said he, springing up to attention. "Bad luck to the whole boiling of them! and is it a gintlemin like yer honner that they are afther traitin' this way? Never mind, sir; the allies—the hand iv Saint Pater be over thim!—are in sight, and may be they will be stormin' this rookery some fine morning, whin, wid the blessin' ov God, we'll see every throat in it cut."

Lisle was boiling with rage at the treatment to which he was subjected:

but that was a slight affair when compared with his anxiety for Virginia, who was now entirely at the mercy of her father, of whose ferocity and remorseless disposition he had seen several examples. For some time he remained immersed in thought, while he strode hastily backward and forward in the narrow compass of their prison; and it was not until Teague's maledictions became very vehement, that Lisle found he had a companion in misfortune.

"Well, friend; and what brought you here?"

"Eight French spalpeens, sir, and my fortine or misfortine, and that little baste ov a major, bad luck to him! I was nigh out ov their claws this very mornin', clever and clane; but they clapped me up here, the ill-mannered bog-trotters! And sure, it 'ud vex ould Moses himself to see the rid coats across the river yonder, and yet be caged up here like a rat in a trap."

"To what regiment do you belong?"

"The Connaught Rangers, yer honner,—the boys that gave Phillipon, the old scrawdon, such a fright at Badajoz."

"A brave corps. And your name?"

"Pat Mulrooney. I come from one side of Dublin, where my father has a beautiful estate, wid deer-parks such as ye never saw on the longest day's march. And though it is meself that siz it, there was not a smarter fellow than me in the whole division, from right to left; no, not one, yer honner! If you plaze, sir, we may yet give the French—bad cess to them! the slip; and by the mortal! I'll stand by yer honner like steel, for shure I'd do it for love if for nothin' else; for the Scots and the Irish were one man's childer in Noah's day. In ould ancient forren times, the blessed Saint Patrick himself was a Scotsman, until his bad-mannered countrymen, in a fit of unkindness, cut off his head, and he swam over wid it under his arm to Donaghadee, and became a good Irishman. Often I have heard old Father O'Rafferty at Dunleary tell us of that, when I used to take him home from Mother Macnoggin's wid a dhrop in his eye. He was the broth of a boy, that ould O'Rafferty, and a riglar devil among the girls, for all that he was a praste; and whin the craytur was in, it's little he'd think of giving the best man in his flock a palthog on the ear. But perhaps it's inthrudin' on yer honner I am?" Louis, though pleased with the fellow's humour, was not in a talking mood. "May my tongue be blisthered if I spake any more to ye, or bother ye in the midst of yer throubles!" said Pat in conclusion.

Anxiety and fear for poor Virginia plunged Lisle into deep despondency, and not all the attempts of honest Mulroonry could wean him from his melancholy reflections. He could scarcely be in any other than an unpleasant mood, as it was rather annoying for a newly-married man to spend the time immediately succeeding his nuptial-day in a stone turret, measuring eight feet by six. Two or three days passed away, and Louis found considerable satisfaction in the knowledge that Virginia was yet near him,—that the walls of the fortress still contained her. He had acquainted his humble friend with his story, and Paddy became more eager than before to serve him; and vowed, for his sake, to face "either man or devil, if he had only an opportunity, bad luck to it!" The place in which they were confined was an *échauguette*, or small turret, built on an acute angle of a bastion close to the gate of the fortress, and from the loop-holes Louis and his friend kept by turns a constant watch, so that it was impossible for Virginia to be carried off without their knowledge; and Lisle would probably have become frantic had he seen her departure, which he hourly expected would take place. One night Mulroony was on sentry at the

loop-hole, watching the gateway, while Louis slept on the floor. The night was intensely dark,—"one on which ye couldn't see yer nose fornenst ye," as Mulrooney himself said.

"Blistheration and blackness be on the day I ever saw ye!" soliloquized he, as he scanned the castle and its defences. "Shure it ud vex Mister Job, let alone a Connaught Ranger, to be caged up here, shaking at ivery puff of wind, like a dog in a wet sack. Bad cess to them, the spalpeens ov blue blazes! Och! how long is this to last at all at all."

"Senor,—Luiz!" said a soft voice, close beside the loop-hole.

"Hubbuboo, tearin' murther! who are you, misthress?" said Mulroony, starting back in dismay as a dark figure, muffled in a hooded mantilla appeared at the loop-hole. "Is it me you're looking for, darlint? Well thin, honey, it's just right you are, for there is not a smarter man in all the Connaught Rangers than Pat Mulroony,—damn the one from right to left! Ye've jist come to the right shop, honey; for, at wake or weddin', who was the jewil ov the young ladies like Mr. Mulrooney?"

"*O madre Maria!*" said poor Virginia, shrinking back in astonishment and grief. Understanding that Louis occupied this turret, she had resolved to pay him a visit, favoured by the darkness of the night and the inattention of her father and the duenna, who were both at that time engaged,—the former at the chess-board with the major, and the latter with her mass-book and brandy-bottle. Trembling with affection, fear, and the chill night-wind, which blew roughly on her delicate frame, she sought the place of Lisle's confinement; and great was her dismay at Mulroony's reply, which, although she did not understand, she well knew to be the voice of a stranger; but she implored him in Spanish, *por amor de San Juan de Dios*, to say where Don Luiz was confined.

"Don't be in such a flustheration, honey," said Mulroony, putting out his arms to embrace her. The lady shrunk back indignantly, and it now occurred to the egotistical gentleman to awaken Louis, thinking the visit might be intended for him.

"I say, sir! here's something wantin' to spake wid ye. I can't tell what it says, because it spakes like naythur Frinchman nor devil, God bless us!" Louis sprung up.

"Virginia!" said he, and gave her his hand through the loop-hole. But she made no reply, save pressing it to her throbbing breast; her heart was too full to permit her to utter anything.

"Virginia, have you any new distress to tell me of?"

"O Luiz!" said she, sobbing as if her heart would burst, "we meet for the last time."

"How!" he exclaimed in distress and alarm, encircling her with his arm as if to keep her with him. "Who will dare to separate us now?"

"My father. To-morrow I go from this; but whether to Paris or Galicia, I know not. O Luiz! his hatred is terrible. But for the intercession of the major, you would have been in eternity by this time." The challenge of a sentinel at the other angle of the bastion, and the tread of a foot, now alarmed them.

"Retire, Virginia, for a moment; 'tis only the patrol, or some affair of that sort. I would not have you discovered here for the world." She had only time to shrink into a corner, and conceal herself behind the carriage of a piece of ordnance, when a man approached the turret. It was the corporal of the guard, who usually came every night before the drums beat, to see that the prisoners were all right. The door was of massive oak, studded with iron nails, and while the corporal was undoing its ponderous fastenings, a sudden thought occurred to Lisle. "Be on the alert, Mulroony," said he; "I will now endeavour to escape, or die in the attempt!"

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"Right, yer honner! I'm yer man. Leave me to dale wid that spalpeen ov a corporal, and by the holy Saint Peter! I won't leave a whole bone in his skin."

"Hush! let us only compel him to give up the watchword, and then we will gag and bind him hard and fast. I need keep faith no longer with those who doubt my parole."

The unsuspecting Frenchman opened the door and looked in, merely to assure himself that the prisoners were in their cage. "Come in, corporal dear," said Mulroony, grasping him by the throat, and dragging him into the chamber.

"*Sacre—diable!*" growled the astonished Gaul, struggling with his athletic adversary, who tripped up his heels, and in a twinkling laid him on his back, and pressed his knees upon his breast.

"Och, honey! don't be in such a divel ov a flusteration! Give but the smallest cry in life, and it's yer neck I'll be dhrawin' like a pullet's!"

"*Merci, monsieur! Ah, miséricorde!*" gasped the half-strangled soldier.

"Come, *monsieur caporal!*" said Louis fiercely; "surrender the countersign, or expect such treatment as desperate men may yield you. Mulroony, take your hand from his throat. Answer, Frenchman, at your peril!"

"MARENGO!" replied the other, and commenced immediately to bellow aloud for his comrades; but his cries were drowned in the singing of the wind and noise of the Nive, which rushed over a steep cascade below the bastion.

"Och, murther! it's all over now; he'll bring the whole pack on us wid his schreechin',—the devil dhraw the tongue out ov ye! Tunder an' oons! Thurf and blazes! what's this he is after now?"

Paddy soon discovered that, and to his cost. The corporal, on getting one hand free, drew his bayonet, and plunged it into the arm of his antagonist, who no sooner found himself wounded, than he broke into a tremendous storm of passion. Thundering out one of those formidable curses which come so glibly from an Irish tongue, he wrested the weapon from the Frenchman, and buried it twice in his breast. All this passed in less than a minute, and the Frenchman expired without a groan.

"Mulroony, have you killed him?" asked Louis, considerably excited.

"Deed have I, sir,—the murderin' villyan!" answered the other composedly.

"Poor fellow! I had no intention that he should be slain. He was but doing his duty."

"A purty thing, to make sich a moan for a spalpeen iv a Frencher," answered the Irishman testily.

"Our lives are now indeed forfeited, if we cannot escape. Virginia!" He went from the turret to where she sat in a sort of stupor with cold and terror, and in a few words informed her that they must escape now, or be for ever lost.

"Blue blazes, sir!" bawled Paddy from the turret door; "is it the wimmen ye're afther? Is this a time to go making love? Musha! musha! sure there's always mischief where they are."

"Quick now, Mulroony,—follow us!" said Louis, who encircled Virginia with his arm to support her. "We have not a moment to lose. Heaven grant me firmness now!"

Armed with the bayonet, and grumbling curses at the blood which was flowing freely from his arm, Mulroony followed Lisle and the lady to the barrier-gate, where two sentries were posted. The night was dark and black, and a dismal wind howled between the works and embrasures.

The sentinels kept within their turrets, and everything seemed favourable to their escape.

"*Qui vive?*" challenged one fellow at the gate. Louis hesitated a moment,—and the British reply "Friend," almost escaped his lips.

"*Belzebub! Qui va là?*" cried the gate-ward, again striking the butt of his firelock on the sentry-box floor.

"Make some answer, or we are undone," whispered Virginia, as she clung in terror to the arm of Louis, who, still advancing towards the gate, replied in a feigned voice—

"*Caporal, hors de la garde.*"

"*Aha!*" replied the sentinel, coming from his box. "*Avance, qui o l'ordre.*"

"MARENGO," replied Louis.

"*Passe, mon ami,*" replied the soldier, returning to his box. His suspicions were lulled, and they gained the gate without further molestation, the darkness of the night rendering their figures so indistinct, that it was impossible for the sentinels to discover them. The barrier was composed of strong planks, through which a little wicket was cut.

"How fortunate!" said Lisle: "the passage is open, and the drawbridge down. We are free, and shall soon be safe among the British troops."

"Huisht, plaze yer honner; its hearin' us they'll be! Be aisy. Help out the lady: will you lane on my arm, too, mem?"

"Senor?" She did not understand him.

An exclamation in Spanish caused them all to start. "*Dios mio!* my father!" shrieked Virginia, as an officer outside the gate sprung forward and drove his sword through the body of the brave Mulroony, who fell mortally wounded, while the guard and sentries came running from all quarters to the spot. Louis found himself again a prisoner, and when on the very brink of freedom.

"Bring a lantern!" exclaimed the duke, whom Lisle's evil genius had brought to the gate, but on what errand he never discovered. "Bring a light, and let us see what soldier of the Emperor is base enough to assist prisoners to escape. I surely heard French spoken by some one."

The drummer of the guard held a lantern to Lisle's face, and his scarlet coat, when it appeared in the light, caused every brow to lour. The countenance of the duke turned pale when he beheld him. His eyes glistened like those of a serpent, as he gazed alternately upon him and Virginia, who in an agony of horror sunk down at his feet, close to the body of the gallant Irishman, whose features were now becoming rigid in death. He had expired almost immediately after receiving the thrust of the Spaniard's sword.

At that moment a soldier came hastily forward, saying that the corporal of the guard lay murdered in the turret from which the prisoners had escaped, and a volley of threats and execrations broke from the men of the 105th, who crowded round.

"Aha!" said the Gascon major, pressing forward. "Is it thus you slay the soldiers of the Emperor? You shall smart for this night's work, *Monsieur Ribaud!*"

"Do you dare to apply such an epithet to me?" replied Lisle furiously, spurning the Gascon with his foot, and struggling to free his arms, which were tightly grasped by the soldiers.

"Bind up his eyes, some of ye, and let him be instantly shot! Give not a moment for prayer or supplication. We will have life for life,—blood for blood!" cried the Spaniard.

"Base renegade! I scorn your malice, and defy you to terrify me," cried Louis, regardless of all consequences, and from despair gathering a

courage which gained him the admiration of the French, though it won from them no mercy. The little major was foaming with exasperation at the insult he had received, and made no longer any intercessions. The private soldiers, who were enraged at the death of their comrade, eyed him likewise in malignant silence. Virginia was borne away senseless, and Lisle gazed sadly after her, until he was startled by the sharp words of command given coolly by a serjeant to six soldiers, who were picked out to become his executioners. For a moment his heart grew sick and sunk within him, when he thought of his home and of those brave comrades who were only a few miles distant. But he scorned to ask mercy from the duke, from the father of Virginia, who by the light of a huge lantern (which cast a dull flickering light on the dark groups of armed soldiers, and still darker walls of the fortress) watched the preparations made by the firing-party with steady gravity and coolness.

"*Chargez vos armes!*" cried the serjeant. "*Prenez la cartouche! Amorcez! L'arme à gauche!*" &c., and the noise of the steel ramrods ringing in the barrels as the cartridges were rammed home, fell like a knell upon the ears of Louis. He certainly grew pale, but his heart never quailed as he looked upon the loading of the muskets. He resolved to die with honour to his character and the garb he wore. At that moment, so critical to him, a French cavalry officer, on a panting horse, dashed up to the gate at full gallop, inquiring with all the hurry and importance of an aide-de-camp for the commandant of the place.

"*Monsieur le Duc,*" said he, "the allies are in motion: their troops have begun to cross the Nive, and Marshal Soult desires that you will be on the alert, and defend the ford, under the guns of this château, to the last." Without waiting for an answer, he wheeled round his horse and galloped out of sight in a moment. The clatter of the hoofs had scarcely died away, before two of the sentinels, posted on the bastion overlooking the ford, fired their muskets. A volley replied, lighting up the whole fortress for an instant, and all became hurry and confusion. Louis was thrust into his old place of confinement,—the castle-gates were secured,—the bridge was drawn up, and in five minutes every man was at his post. From the inmost recesses of his heart Lisle thanked Heaven for his narrow escape; and while in the close compass of his prison he listened to the booming cannon and musketry, which shook the ancient fabric to its foundations, he earnestly prayed that the attack would be successful; and he well knew, by the hearty British cheers which from time to time came ringing on the wind, even above the noise of the conflict, that his comrades were carrying all before them.

CHAPTER XI.

PASSAGE OF THE NIVE.

An order having been issued for a general attack on the enemy's position at the Nive on the morning of the 9th of December, an hour before daybreak the allied army got under arms, in high spirits and glee at the prospect of fighting monsieur on his own ground, and prosecuting their victorious career still farther into France. But as it is not my purpose to give an account of that brilliant affair, I will confine myself to the adventures of our friends. In Stuart's quarter, or billet,—a miserable and half-ruined cottage,—the officers who were to be under his command on a certain duty, sat smoking cigars and carousing on the common wine of the

country, until the signal "to arms" was given. The party consisted of his own subs,—of Blacier and a Spanish captain, Castronuno, a tall and sombre cavalier, lank, lean, and bony, and who might very well have passed for the Knight of La Mancha. Their supper consisted of tough ration *carne* (beef), broiled over the fire on ramrods, and eaten without salt,—an article which was always so scarce, that a *duro* would have been given for a tea-spoonful. This poor fare Blacier improved by swallowing an ample mess of chopped cabbage and vinegar, and by puffing assiduously at his *meerschaum*. After having stuffed himself until belt and button strained almost to starting, he deposited in his havresack a quantity of spare bread and meat for his breakfast. Castronuno, who had been observing his gluttony with quiet wonder, recommended him to eat his breakfast then, as it would save trouble on the morrow. This advice Stuart enforced by adding, that he might be knocked on the head before day broke, and perhaps all his good provender would go to swell some other man's paunch.

"*Mein Gott!*" groaned the German, "vat you say is right. I veel eat vile I can. *Hagel! mein Herr*, you hab gibben de soond advice." And he commenced a fresh attack on the viands, and quickly transferred them from the havresack to his distended stomach. He had scarcely finished, and let out four holes in his sword-belt, before the sharp Celtic visage of Serjeant Macrone was seen peering through the clouds of tobacco-smoke, as he informed Stuart, "Tat ta lads were a' standin' to their airms on the plain stanes."

It was then an hour before daybreak, and the sky was dark and gloomy. Stuart noiselessly paraded his troops—the "light-bobs," Blacier's riflemen, and Castronuno's Spaniards, and moved up the banks of the stream, to execute the duty assigned to him. This was to carry by storm the castle of the Nive, that the troops in its immediate neighbourhood might be enabled to cross by the ford, the passage of which was swept by the guns of the fortress. The day preceding the projected assault, Ronald and Blacier made a reconnoissance of the place, and found that there was no other method but to ford the river below the neighbouring cascade, and carrying the outer defences by storm, trusting to Heaven and their own hands for the rest, as the tall keep might be defended against musketry for an age, unless a piece of cannon was brought to bear upon it.

At the time mentioned, an hour before dawn, the whole of the troops in and about Cambo were under arms, and the signal to cross was to be the storming of the château. The companies destined to effect this dangerous piece of service marched up the bank of the Nive a few miles, and, favoured by the intense darkness, halted immediately opposite to the scene of action among some olive-trees, which were, however, bare and leafless. There a consultation was held, and it was determined to proceed forthwith. All appeared still within the château. The sentries on the bastions and palisades were seen passing and repassing the embrasures, but the noise of their tread was drowned in the rush of the cascade, which poured furiously over a ledge of rock a few yards above the fort, and plunged into a deep chasm, from which a constant cloud of spray arose. Desiring Evan Bean Iverach to keep close by his side, Ronald, with a section of twelve picked Highlanders carrying three stout ladders, led the way. Under the command of Evan Macpherson, the rest of the company followed close upon his heels, with their bayonets pointing forward, and every man's hand on the lock of his musket. Old Blacier, who was as brave as a lion, notwithstanding all his oddities, prepared to mount the works by escalade a little further up the stream, where his riflemen were in imminent danger of being drenched by the spray of the waterfall. Two companies of the 18th

Spanish corps of the line were to form a reserve, under the command of Don Alfonso de Castronuno.

"Now then, lads," said Ronald, while his heart leaped and his breath came thick and close, for the moment was an exciting one, "keep up your locks from the stream, and look well to your priming,—though we must trust most to butt and bayonet."

"*Qui va là?*" challenged a sentinel.

"You'll soon find that out, my boy," cried Stuart, brandishing his sword. "Forward! Gordon Highlanders. Hurrah!"

"*Demeurez là!*" cried the Gaul in dismay, while he fired his piece in concert with three or four others. A Highlander fell in the stream wounded, and was sucked into the linn, where he perished instantly. His comrades let fly a rattling volley, and pressed boldly forward. The water rose nearly to their waists, but the Celts had an advantage over their comrades in trowsers. Raising the thick tartan folds of their kilts, they crossed the river, keeping all their clothing, the hose excepted, perfectly dry.

The Nive, at the place where they crossed, was several yards wide, and the current, on the surface of which some pieces of thin ice floated, was intensely cold; but the hardy Highlanders pressed onward, grasping each other by the hand, and crossed safely, but not without several unlooked-for delays. The bed of the river was pebbly, slippery as glass, and full of holes, which caused them to stumble every moment, and a scaling-ladder was nearly carried away by the stream. The rocks were steep and precipitous, rising to the height of several yards abruptly from the water. The ladders were planted among the pebbles; and when one point of the rock was gained, they had to draw them up before they could reach another, and so arrive at the foot of the sloping bastion, which was now bristling with bayonets. By the time the escalade approached the outworks, every soldier in the château was at his post, and the cannon had begun to belch their iron contents, which, however, passed harmlessly over the heads of the assailants. The fierce northern blood of the latter was now roused in good earnest, and their natural courage seemed only to receive a fresh stimulus from the din of war around them.

Accustomed from infancy to climb like squirrels, the Scotsmen clambered up the rocks, grasping weeds and tufts of grass,—finding assistance and support where other men would have found none; and in less space of time than I take to record it, they were all at the base of the bastion.

"Up and on! Forward, my brave Highland hearts!" cried Ronald Stuart, springing recklessly up the perilous ladder, waving his sword, and feeling in his mind the wild—almost mad, sensations of chivalry and desperation, which no man can imagine save one who has led a forlorn hope. "Death or glory! Hurrah! the place is our own!" At that moment a twenty-four pounder was run through the embrasure and discharged above his head. It was so close, that the air of the passing ball almost stunned him; he felt the hot glow of the red fire on his cheek, and the deadly missile whistled over his bonnet, and boomed away into the darkness. Several fire-balls were tossed over the works by the French. These burned with astonishing brilliancy and splendour wherever they alighted,—even in the middle of water, where they roared, sputtered, and hissed like devils, but would not be quenched until they burned completely away.

Those which fell upon the rocks served to reveal the storming-party to the deadly aim of the defenders, and at the same time added to the singularity, the picturesque horror of the scene, by the alternate glares of red, blue, and green light which they shed upon the castled rock, the bristling bastions, the rushing river, the gleaming arms, and the bronzed features of

men, whose hearts the excitement of the moment had turned to iron. Unluckily, the first ladder planted against the breastwork broke, and the men fell heavily down.

Enraged at this discomfiture, Stuart leaped up the rocks again, though drenched with water,—but blows had been already interchanged. A second ladder had been planted by Macpherson, who leaped into an embrasure at the very moment a cannon was discharged through it, and he narrowly escaped being blown to pieces. With charged bayonets the resolute Highlanders poured in after him in that headlong manner which was never yet withstood, and a fierce conflict ensued, foot to foot, and hand to hand. From their lack of muscular power, the French are ever at disadvantage in such strife; and although many of the assailants were forced over the parapet and slain, the outworks were entirely captured in a few minutes. The Germans under old Blacier, who led them on with his sabre in one hand and his meerschaum in the other, effected an entrance at one angle, while the Spanish officer commanding the reserve bravely carried another, finding it impossible to restrain his soldiers, whose triumphant shout of "*Santiago y Espana! Viva!*" struck the French with dismay. Finding themselves attacked successfully on three points, they became distracted, and were driven tumultuously from bastion and palisade, after which their own cannon were wheeled round on them. Nevertheless they fought with the chivalrous courage of old France. The top of the keep was lined with chasseurs, who madly continued to pour down an indiscriminate fire of musketry on friends and foes, and the barbican was full of blood and corpses in five minutes. Brilliant fire-balls were also cast over, and the glare thrown by them on the bloody earth, the flashing weapons and powder-blackened visages of the combatants, produced an effect never to be forgotten by a beholder.

Poor Blacier, who had been shot through the lungs at the moment he entered the court, hurled his sabre among the enemy and crawled away into a corner, where he smoked composedly as he bled to death,—or at least appeared to smoke. The Gascon major of the 105th was encountered by Alfonso de Castronuno, who at the second blow laid him dead at his feet, but almost at the same moment the Spaniard himself expired: a shot had passed through his heart. Remembering Louis Lisle, and animated by a bitter hatred against all who wore the same garb, the duke, with his cloak rolled round his left arm and accoutred with sword and dagger, leaped among the Highlanders, calling on the French to follow; but no man obeyed. He would have been instantly bayoneted but for Ronald, who was the first man he encountered, and who ordered the soldiers to leave them hand to hand. In avoiding the duke's stiletto, Stuart stumbled over the corse of Castronuno, and would have been instantly despatched, but for the crossed bayonets of a dozen soldiers.

"Save him!" cried Stuart. "Macpherson! Evan Bean! take him alive."

"Haud!" cried Iverach sternly. "Stand, ye black son o' the devil! Back—back; or my bayonet's through ye in a twinkling." But the furious Spaniard spat upon him in the bitterness of his fury, and the next moment his blood was reeking on Evan's weapon. He fell prone to the earth, and even while he lay choking in blood, he continued to curse and spit at the conquerors, until the Spaniards destroyed him by trampling him to death. The moment he fell, the French surrendered, after being hemmed into a corner, and finding it impossible to maintain the conflict longer. On both sides the slaughter was very great, and upwards of two hundred lay killed in the court or barbican. The chasseurs on the top of the keep did not yield until threatened that the place would be blown up; on which they

laid down their arms, and joined the other prisoners, who formed a sullen band, ranked in a corner and guarded by the Spaniards, for whom they showed their scorn and contempt so openly, that three or four were killed.

Many of the captives were mere boys, poor conscripts, who only a month before had been compelled to resign the shovel for the musket; and some were the old and high-spirited soldiers of the Emperor,—stern fellows, with bronzed and scarred cheeks, rough moustaches, and mouths black with the cartridges they had bitten. They looked around them with an air of haughty pride, defiance, and *nonchalance*, which only a Frenchman can assume under such circumstances. When daylight dawned, Blacier was found lying dead. When last seen alive, he was sitting philosophically watching the pool formed by his blood; and thus he expired with his pipe in his mouth, an inveterate smoker to the last.

"Keep order among the prisoners!" cried Stuart, on the occasion of a brawl ensuing between them and the Spaniards. "Your fellows must restrain their national animosity,—just now, at least," added he firmly, to the Spanish lieutenant commanding the escort.

"*Bueno!* but how am I to do it? See you, senor," said the Spaniard, "how the Frenchmen spit upon and upbraid them, as if they were so many Moors or Portuguese? *Virgin del Pilar!* I would hew them down to ribbons, but for the contrary order of senor the great *Capitan Général*,—the Duke of Vittoria."*

"Stay, senor," said Stuart; "one should treat with generosity a conquered enemy."

"On my honour, *capitan*," replied the other, "old Cuesta would have had them all swimming down the Nive, had he commanded here."

"Holloa, Stuart," cried Macpherson; "come this way! Here is another uproar. Never mind the prisoners; one might as well sing psalms to a dead horse, as speak of generosity to a Spaniard."

Their attention was arrested by the report of a musket; and hurrying to where the sound came from, they found several Highlanders engaged in beating down the door of a turret. This operation Iverach shortened, by applying his musket and blowing the lock to pieces,—a perilous exploit for the inmate, who narrowly escaped being shot through the body. Evan next applied his shoulder to the shattered barrier, and burst it open.

"Maister Lisle o' the Inch-house! Hurrah! How happy I am to see you. Od, this dings a'!" he exclaimed in breathless astonishment, as Lisle issued from his place of confinement.

"Ha! Louis," cried Stuart, grasping his hand in wonder. "Is it possible that they treat you in this unworthy manner, caging you up in a place like a dog-kennel? I thought you were enjoying yourself on parole in France?"

"No, faith! I have been locked up like a gaol-bird in Pampeluna, and other infernal places, ever since that unlucky affair at Fuente Duenna; and yet, after all, I do not regret it."

"Indeed!"

"Why, you have yet to learn. But where is Virginia,—Virginia de Alba?"

"How on earth should I know, Louis. 'Tis an odd question; but her father's blood, the fierce old villain! is yet red on Evan's bayonet."

"What is this you tell me?" said Lisle frowning. "Was the duke slain?"

"He fell in the assault," replied Macpherson, "and thus escaped the axe, the *garrote*, or a volley through the back,—all of which he so well merited."

* Wellington's Spanish title.

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"Stay, Macpherson!" interrupted Lisle, so angrily that the other was indignant. "I will not hear him spoken of thus. He has gone to his last account,—so rail against him no more. Truly, he deserves little pity from me, for I have suffered much at his hands; but that you will all know another time. Virginia! Virginia! for Heaven's sake tell me something about her!"

"I never heard aught of the lady since we were last at Aranjuez; but I hope the *ci-devant* abbess is well, notwithstanding the demerits of her fierce and treacherous father. Your hand again, Louis! My dear fellow, I congratulate you on your freedom. All are well at Inchavon, and—but meantime duty must be attended to." And, ignorant of the cause of Lisle's deep anxiety, he turned away, crying, "Holloa, Macrone! Where is that confounded old humbug loitering? In the spirit-store, likely. Ah! get the company under arms, and let the piper blow the gathering."

"I trust in Heaven that the tower yet contains her!" exclaimed Lisle. "I will find her, or be guilty of some desperate thing. Follow me, Evan, and some of you, my true old comrades! The keep is full of Spaniards and Germans, who are wont to be unscrupulous enough, when heated by the fury of an assault. Forward, Highlanders! We will ransack the prison-house, and a score of dollars shall be his who finds the lady!"

He snatched up the sword from the dead hand of Castronuno, and, followed by a few soldiers, rushed up the stairs of the keep, and sought at once the boudoir, or apartment of Virginia, whom he found in the act of surrendering her bracelets and rings to a *cazadore*, who had terrified her to extremity by his oaths and menaces. The Spaniard was a powerful Asturian, but Louis grasped him by his black cross-belts, and hurled him down stairs like an infant, for rage supplied him with unusual strength. Virginia clasped him in her arms, and hung weeping and sobbing bitterly; while Ronald Stuart and his lieutenant, Evan Macpherson, who had followed Louis up stairs, stood for a few moments at the door, unwilling to intrude upon them.

As she hung thus drooping on Lisle's breast, although less gaily attired than when at the Aranjuez ball, Virginia yet looked surpassingly beautiful. She had no veil or comb, and the massive braids of her dark-brown hair hung free and loose over her pale cheek and delicate blue-veined neck, of which rather more than usual was displayed, in consequence of the disorder of her dress. Her attendant had been preparing her for bed at the moment the assault took place; and want of sleep, together with the terror and anxiety under which she had been labouring, rendered her paler than usual. Tears were rolling fast from the long lashes which shaded her light hazel eyes, but they only made her more bewitching.

An exclamation of surprise, which Ronald found it impossible to restrain, caused her to start and blush deeply, for her arms, feet, and ankles were bare, and her graceful attire was all in disorder; but she threw her veil and mantilla instantly around her.

"There are none here but friends, Virginia," said Louis, to reassure her; and he introduced her to Ronald and Macpherson as "the Honourable Mrs. Lisle."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Stuart. "How fortunate—how happy! I have a thousand pardons to ask, Louis, for treating your anxiety so lightly. Allow me to congratulate you—"

"And me too, Lisle, old fellow!" added Macpherson. "I wish you all joy, but I cannot pay my respects to the donna, because my Spanish, which is none of the best, always turns into Gaelic, and never comes glibly to my tongue until after sunset."

"O senores!" said the lady, "such a night of horrors this has been!

I heard all the dreadful conflict above, beneath, and around me,—and, Holy Mother Mary! I shall never forget it. I looked but once from my window, and the scene of the night assault will never be effaced from my remembrance. O 'tis a fearful thing to see men fighting for death and life, and destroying each other like wild beasts or demons! But where is the duke? Have not you seen him, senor cavaliers? Oh, search for my father, and bring him instantly to me, that I may be assured of his safety."

"Alas! senora," answered Stuart, "I regret—I fear we cannot gratify you in this matter—"

"Holy Virgin!" she faltered. "*Caballero*, you mean not to tell me that my father is no more,—that your *soldados* have slain him?" She spoke in a voice of exquisite tenderness, and laid her fair hand on Ronald's arm, grasping it tightly, and he gazed on her with some confusion. Her bright eyes were full of fire, and seemed to search his heart for an answer, while her half-parted lips displayed a fair set of brilliant teeth. "*Noble Official!* tell me if my father lives," she added, bursting into tears.

"I fear the duke has escaped," replied Ronald, unwilling to afflict her by revealing the truth; for, notwithstanding the duke's sternness and severity, she had always tenderly loved him. "He must have escaped, senora, as I have not seen him since the place was stormed. He must have fled."

"No, cavalier. My father would perish rather than fly," said the young lady indignantly. "He comes of a race whose blood has fallen on a thousand fields, but never from the veins of a coward."

"Pardon, *gracios senora;* I meant not to say that he had fled, but only retreated," said Stuart. "But pray excuse me for a moment, as my presence is required below." He retired with the intention of ordering the body of the ignoble duke to be looked after, that it might not shock the eyes of his daughter; but the soldiers of Alfonso de Castronuno had beforehand disposed of it in a summary manner. In the intensity of their hatred, they tied a few cannon-shot to the body and tossed it into the chasm at the bottom of the cascade, where it could never be found again. The troops engaged in the capture of the château remained there for the ensuing day, during the whole of which firing was heard along the line of the Nive. With their usual success, the allies crossed the river in triumph, and drove the troops of Soult before them pell-mell.

After his horse had been shot under him, Fassifern fought on foot, and four times led his victorious Highlanders on to the charge, sword in hand, and four times successively the stubborn masses of the enemy gave way before them. But the Celtic impetuosity was not to be resisted. Their black plumes were seen dashing on through bayonets, blood, and smoke, as they hurled the columns of the French before them as clouds are driven by the gale. Every regiment distinguished itself, and many charged desperately with the bayonet.

Even old Dugald Mhor, animated by the gallant example of his master, forgot his white hairs and failing powers, and distinguished himself by his prowess, and by the address with which he unhorsed and captured a French staff-officer. * * * * *

On the 27th of February, 1814, the allies gained the battle of Orthez, a victory which was succeeded by the passages of the Adour and Garonne, and by the most signal defeat of the Duke of Dalmatia before Toulouse, on Easter Sunday, the 10th of April.

Many of the British regiments suffered severely. The gallant 61st were reduced to scarcely fifty men, I believe; and the Gordon Highlanders were also roughly handled by the enemy. Stuart was wounded, and he lost many of the friends who survived the fatal battles of the Pyrenees, and

among them was Evan Iverach, the faithful and affectionate young fellow who had become a soldier for his sake, abandoning his home, his sweetheart, and his aged father, and who had followed and served him with the love of a younger brother, the respect of a vassal, and the disinterested devotion of a Highlander.

The light companies had been thrown forward as skirmishers, and Stuart's fell into a sort of ambush formed by the enemy, who poured a destructive fire upon them. Lieutenant Evan Macpherson was killed, and a ball passed through the breast of Iverach, which laid him prostrate on the turf. He had previously been wounded in the left knee, but he had refused to retire from the field, protesting that he would fight while he had breath left in his body. Thrown into disorder by this unexpected volley, the company retired, and Ronald, as he staggered about confused by the concussion of a rifle-ball which grazed his left temple, heard the deep moans of pain which were uttered by poor Iverach. Regardless of the French fire, he rushed forward, and raising him in his arms, bore him off in the face of the foe, who suspended their firing on witnessing the action, which gained Ronald the love and esteem of every soldier who beheld it. Two Highlanders soon relieved him of his burden, and carried Iverach, who was enduring great agony, to a place which was secure from the bullets of the enemy's riflemen. He was laid at the back of a stone wall, which formed the boundary of a meadow or field. The first thing he cried for was water; and Stuart, filling his canteen in a muddy ditch, the only place from which he could procure it, held it to the hot quivering lips of the sufferer, who, after he had drunk greedily, expressed much more concern to behold blood trickling from Ronald's temple, than for the probable issue of his own wound. Whenever he spoke, he was almost suffocated with his own blood; and ceasing the attempt, he leaned his head against the wall, and while tears trickled over his face, gazed with an eye of intense affection upon his master, who knelt down beside him, and as gently as a mother would have done, unclasped his accoutrements and opened his coat, that he might breathe more freely.

Stuart, the assistant-surgeon, who had been sitting opportunely on the other side of the wall, ready for action, with his case of instruments displayed around him like a pedler's wares, whispered in Ronald's ear with most medical composure, "It is all over with him, poor fellow! Rejoin your company before Cameron misses you: Iverach will die in ten minutes."

"I cannot leave him," said Stuart, deeply distressed. "Oh, cannot you do something for him? I would yield all I possess on earth to save Evan's life!"

"He is bleeding more internally than outwardly, and were I to attempt to stop the discharge of blood from his mouth and breast, he would be instantly suffocated."

"D—nation, Dick!" said Ronald angrily, "and will you leave him to die?"

"He will die without my assistance: on my honour, I can do nothing! He is past my skill, and I have other work on hand. See how the wounded are pouring down from the height! I must indeed leave you."

He snatched up his box, and ran to where four soldiers of the 61st had laid down Coghlan, their eccentric old colonel, who had received a shot which entered the top of his left epaulet and came out at his right side. But he, too, was past Stuart's skill, and died instantly.

Evan heard not what passed, but learned the doctor's opinion from the sad expression of his master's face.

"O sir! and sae he has gien me ower," said he, speaking in a broken

and difficult manner, while the blood continued to gurgle incessantly in his throat. He held out his hand, and Ronald, taking it in his own, knelt down beside him. "And sae, sir, he has gien me ower. I thocht as muckle, but he micht, he micht hae tried to save me. But na, na! it's a' ower noo. I ken my weird mon a' be fulfilled; I kent I wad fa' the day. There was an unco sooghin' in my heart a' the last nicht. Something seemed aye whispering in my lug it was the last I was doomed to see. Oich, ay! it will be sair news to auld Donald Iverach, whan he hears that Evan Bean—his Evan with the fair hair, Evan that he was aye sae fond o', has de'ed in the land o' the foe and the stranger. But, O dear maister Ronald! ye'll tell him,—ye'll tell a' the folk in the bonnie glen, when ye gang hame to Miss Alice, that I died as became me, with my bonnet on my brow, and my face to the enemy."

"I will, Evan, I will," groaned Ronald.

"I have always dune my duty, sir, to you and to my cuintry."

"You have, Evan,—bravely and nobly."

"Thanks, sir, thanks! Ye'll say that Evan, the son of Iverach, never flinched in the dark hour o' trial and danger!" said he, while his eyes lighted up with Highland enthusiasm. "Tell them this,—that the auld folk may remember me in their prayers, when the coronach is sung for me in the clachan at Lochisla."

"My poor Evan, you will exhaust yourself."

"My time is short noo," he replied in a moaning voice; "but, oh! this will be sad news to my auld faither. My death will bring sorrow and dule on his grey hairs. And then there is Jessie—Jessie Cavers o' the Inch-house, at Avonside!" He began to sob, and his tears mingled with his blood. He sunk back exhausted, and lay still for a short time, during which he muttered to himself,—"The gowden braid—her lock o' hair! An ill omen,—cut in twa by a sabre at Orthez. O Jessie! my sweet wee love, maun we never meet mair?

"Maister Ronald!" said he, in a quivering voice, "see that Jessie gets a' my back pay. There's three months o't gane, come the neist Lord's-day. Let her put it to her tocher,—'twill help her to get anither love. I release her frae the troth she gaed to me. Alake—" And his voice died away in a gentle wail.

"Evan, this money,—hear me; this pay you speak of,—shall I not give it to your father, rather than this Jessie Cavers, who may, perhaps, have forgotten you?"

"She never will forget me!" cried Iverach, with an impetuosity which caused the gore to rush from his wound and mouth fearfully. "If I thocht she had proved fause to her plichted aith, I wad haunt her till her dyin' day. Yird an' stane wadna' haud me! But my faither,—gie him this, sir; for he wad fling siller into the loch, as if it burnt his hand."

He undid from his bonnet the regimental badge which fastened the black cockade and upright green feather. It was a wreath of thistles, encircling a Sphynx, and the word *Egypt* stamped in brass. "Gie—gie him this: he will wear it for my sake,—the sake o' his Evan Bean. And now, Heaven bless ye, Maister Ronald, and grant that ye may live lang and happily after I'm gane to dust, and the grass o' many a year has grown and withered ower me. Ye've been a kind maister,—a gude friend,—and a gude officer to me. God bless Colonel Cameron, and every officer and private man in the regiment; I thocht to have been spared to gang hame wi' ye a' to auld Scotland; but that hath been ordained itherways. But—but—"

His voice failed him again, and his eyes grew dull and glassy, while his face became overspread with the livid hue of death, and assumed that ex-

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pression which is terrible to look upon. On a sudden he started, and seemed to gaze intently on some distant object.

"Evan!" said Stuart in astonishment. "What see you, that you gaze thus?"

"My faither the piper," said he in a breathless voice, while he grasped Ronald convulsively with one hand, and with the other pointed to some vision of his imagination. "'Tis my faither!" he added, in a voice thrilling with death and delight. "He comes to find me in the deid-thraw! Yonder, yonder he comes,—doon by the dyke-side. His pipes a' braw wi' ribbons frae the drones, and his tartan plaid waving behind him!"

Startled by the energy of the dying soldier, Ronald looked in the direction pointed out. No such appearance was visible to him; but there lay the broad bosom of the Garonne, refulgent with the noon-day sun,—sweeping in watery majesty past the towers and spires of Toulouse, and disappearing among the deep forests, which were resounding with the clang of the battle that was waged hotly and fiercely before the walls of the city.

"Evan," said he, mournfully, "I see not the figure you mention."

But there was no reply: the Highlander had ceased to exist. The blood oozed slowly and heavily from his wound, and his distended and glassy eyes were yet fixed with the glare of death on the scene of the distant battle-field.

An exclamation of deep anguish burst from Ronald Stuart on beholding the breathless body of his humble but gallant friend, which presented a woful spectacle, being drenched in blood from the chin to the shoe-buckle. He tied a handkerchief over the face, and disposing the body in its plaid, he hewed down an olive-tree with his sword, and with the branches covered it up, that it might be unmolested by the peasantry and death-hunters, until he could return and commit it to the earth.

This done, he tied up his own wound, which till then he had forgotten, and again sought the field, where flashing steel and eddying smoke bore token of the strife. Toulouse was the last, and one of the most keenly-contested battles of the Peninsular war; and it was very generally believed by the allied army, that Soult, when it took place, was aware that peace had been concluded between Great Britain and France.

CHAPTER XII.

TOULOUSE.

The long and bloody war of the Peninsula had now been brought to a final close, and the troops looked forward with impatience to the day of embarkation for their homes. The presence of the allied army was no longer necessary in France; but the British forces yet lingered about the Garonne, expecting the long-wished and long-looked for route for Britain. The Gordon Highlanders were quartered at Muret, a small town on the banks of the Garonne, and a few miles from Toulouse. One evening, while the mess were discussing, over their wine, the everlasting theme of the probable chances of the corps being ordered to Scotland, the sound of galloping hoofs and the clank of accoutrements were heard in the street of the village. A serjeant of the First Dragoons, with the foam-bells hanging on his horse's bridle, reined up at the door of the inn where the officers of the Highlanders had established a temporary mess-house. Old Dugald Cameron was standing at the door, displaying his buirdly person to a group of staring villagers, with whom he was attempting to converse

in a singular mixture of broad northern Scots, Spanish, and French, all of which his hearers found not very intelligible.

The horseman dashed up to the door with the splendid air of the true English dragoon, and with an importance which caused the villagers to shrink back. Inquiring for Colonel Cameron, he handed to Dugald two long official packets; and after draining a deep hornful of liquor which the Celt brought him, he wheeled his charger round, and rode slowly away.

"Letters frae the toon o' Toulouse, sir," said Dugald, as, with his flat bonnet under his arm, and smoothing down his white hair, he advanced to Fassifern's elbow, and laid the despatches before him; after which he retired a few paces, and waited to hear the contents, in which he considered he had as much interest as any one present. The clamour and laughter of the mess-room were instantly hushed, and every face grew grave, from the ample visage of Campbell, who was seated on the colonel's right hand, down to the fair-cheeked ensigns (or Johny Newcomes), who always ensconced themselves at the foot of the table, to be as far away as possible from the colonel and seniors.

"Fill your glasses, gentlemen," said Cameron, as he broke the seal of the first despatch; "fill a bumper, and drink 'to a fair wind.' My life on't 'tis the route, and we shall soon have Old England on our lee!"

"Praise Heaven 'tis come at last!" said Campbell, filling up his glass with bright sparkling sherry. "I never hailed it with greater joy, even in Egypt. But what says Sir Arthur—the marquis, I mean?"

"'Tis the route!" replied Cameron, draining his glass. "To-morrow, at daybreak, we march for Toulouse."

"Hurrah!" said the major. "We shall have the purple heather under our brogues in a week more. Hoigh! Here's to the Highlandmen, shoulder to shoulder!" Every glass was reversed, while a round of applause shook the room.

"We embark on the Garonne," continued Cameron, consulting the document. "Flat-bottomed boats will convey us down the river, and we shall sail in transports for Cork."

"Hech! how, sirs! Cork?" exclaimed Campbell, in a tone of disappointment. "*Demonios!* as the dons say; and are we not going home to our own country,—to the land of the bannock and bonnet?"

"Ireland is our destination. A famous place to soldier in, as I know from experience, major."

"I love poor Paddy well enough," said Campbell: "who is there that would not, that has seen a charge of the Connaught rangers, or the 87th? Regular devils they are for fighting. But we were sent home to braid Scotland after Egypt; and we saw service there, gentlemen. Old Ludovick Lisle, and Cameron there, could tell you that. But the other paper, colonel; what is it about?"

"A despatch for General the Condé Penne Villamur, at Elizondo. It is to be forwarded instantly by the first officer for duty: who is he?"

"Stuart," said the adjutant.

"The deuce take your memory!" said Stuart testily, as this announcement fell like a thunderbolt upon him; "you seem to have the roster all by heart. Colonel, is it possible that I am really to travel nearly a hundred miles, and to cross those abominable Pyrenees again, after fighting my way to Toulouse?"

"Without doubt," replied Fassifern, drily. "You will have the pleasure of seeing Spain once more, and again paying your respects to the gazelle-eyed senoritas and pompous senores."

"I would readily dispense with these pleasures. But might not Wellington have sent an aide or a dragoon with this despatch?"

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"*He* seems not to think so. There is no help, Ronald, my man. You would not throw your duty on another. Obedience is the first— You know the adage: 'tis enough. You can rejoin us at Toulouse, where we embark in eight days from this."

"Eight days?"

"Make good use of your nag: you will require one, of course. Campbell will lend you his spare charger 'Egypt,' as he styles it."

"With the utmost pleasure," said the major, filling up his glass. "But look well to him by the way, for he is an especial good piece of horse-flesh as ever was foaled, or any man found for nothing on that memorable day of June, on the plains of Vittoria. But when I remember the airing you took with my steed at Almarez, I cannot lend you Egypt without entertaining some secret fears of never beholding him again."

"Have no fears for Egypt, major," said Ronald, laughing. "I will restore him without turning a hair of his glossy coat."

"Then, Stuart, you must march forthwith," said Cameron; "the marquis's despatch must be carried onward without delay. You must reach St. Gaudens by sunrise."

Dugald was despatched to desire Jock Pentland, the major's bat-man, to caparison Egypt; and meanwhile Stuart hurried to his billet, where he hastily selected a few necessaries for his journey, and packed them in a horse-valise. In case of accidents, he indited a hasty letter for Lochisla; but, for reasons which will be given in another chapter, it never reached those for whom it was destined.

To his servant, Allan Warristoun, poor Evan's successor, he abandoned the care of his baggage, desiring him to have it all in readiness against the hour of march on the morrow. He belted his sword and dirk tightly to his waist, and examined the holsters, to see if the pistols were freshly flinted and in good order; after which he examined his ammunition, well knowing that the more lead bullets and the less loose cash he had about him, the better for travelling on such unsafe ground as the Lower Pyrenees. He remembered that the whole of these waste places were infested by hordes of lawless banditti, composed of all the rascal crew of Spain,—guerriflas, whose trade was at an end, broken or deserted soldiers, unfrocked monks, fugitive *presidiarios* or convicts, bravoes, *valientes*, and vagabonds of every kind, with which the long war, the absence of order and law, together with the loose state of Spanish morals, had peopled every part of the country. While the remembrance of these gentlemen passed through his mind, Stuart again examined his arms and horse-equipage carefully, and mounting, rode forth along the dark, straggling street of Muret. From the mess-room window there was handed to him a parting bumper of sherry, which he drank in his saddle.

"Good-bye, Lisle!" said he, waving his hand; "bid Virginia adieu for me. And now good-bye, lads; good-bye to ye all;" and, striking spurs into Egypt, he galloped off.

"He is a fine fellow, and keeps his seat as well as any cavalier of the *Prado* at Madrid," said the major, watching Stuart's retreating figure as long as he could see it by the starlight. "He is a fine fellow, and I wish he was safe back again among us. He has a long and a perilous path before him, over these d——d Pyrenees; and ten to one he never returns again from among those black-browed and uncanny dons. We all know Spanish ingratitude, sirs!" The worthy major knew not how prophetically he spoke.

Next morning the regiment marched to Toulouse, and remained eight days, awaiting the arrival of the boats and other small craft to convey

them down the Garonne, which becomes navigable at a short distance from the city.

The eight days passed away, and Ronald Stuart did not return. The eventful day arrived—the day of embarkation for home, and the regiment paraded on the river-side without him. The officers glanced darkly at each other, and the colonel shook his head sorrowfully, as if he deemed that all was not right; and a murmured curse on the Spaniards was muttered among the soldiers. The whole regiment, from Fassifern down to the youngest drum-boy, regretted his absence, which gave room for so many disagreeable constructions and surmises. Other corps were parading at the same time, and in the stir, bustle, and confusion of embarking men and horses, baggage, women, and children, his absence was forgotten for a time. The cheers of the soldiers and the din of various bands were heard everywhere. The time was one of high excitement, and joy shone on every bronzed face as boat after boat got under way, and, with its freight, moved slowly down the Garonne—"the silvery Garonne," the windings of which soon hid the bridge, the spires, the grey old university, and the beautiful forests of Toulouse.

CHAPTER XIII.

ADVENTURES.

STUART departed from Muret in no pleasant mood, having a conviction that he was the most unfortunate fellow in the army; because, when any disagreeable duty was to be performed, by some strange fatality the lot always fell upon him. But his displeasure evaporated as the distance between Muret and himself increased. It was a clear and beautiful night. Millions of sparklers studded the firmament, and, although no moon was visible, the scenery around was distinctly discernible. Afar off lay Toulouse, the direction of which was marked only by the hazy halo of light around it, arising from amidst the bosky forests, which extend over nearly a hundred thousand acres of ground.

Beford him spread a clear and open country, over which his horse was now carrying him at a rapid pace. It was midnight before the lights of Muret vanished behind him. The road became more lonely, and no sound broke upon the silence of the way, save the clang of Egypt's hoofs, ringing with a sharp iron sound on the hard-trodden road.

After riding nearly twenty miles, he found himself becoming tired and drowsy; and dismounting, he led his horse into a copse by the road-side, where, fastening the bridle to a tree, he lay down on the dewy sward, and, placing his claymore under his head, fell fast asleep. Before sunrise he was again in his saddle, and, without breaking his fast, reached the town of Saint Gaudens, on the Garonne, forty-four miles from Toulouse. Unwilling to waste farther the strength of the noble animal which had borne him so far, and with such speed, he halted at Saint Gaudens for twelve hours, and again set forward on the direct road for the province of Bearn.

The well-known chain of the Pyrenees, the scene of so many a recent contest, began to rise before him, and as he proceeded, every object which met his view became more familiar.

On nearing the Pass of Roncesvalles, he reached the block-house which his light company had garrisoned and defended so stoutly. It was now falling into ruin, and the skeletons of the French were lying around it,

with the rank dog-grass sprouting among their mouldering bones. A ghastly sight!—but many such occurred as he journeyed among the mountains. Near the block-house he fell in with an encampment of *gitanos*, or gipsies, a people whose ferocity is equalled only by their cunning and roguery. They were at dinner, and bade him welcome to the feast, which consisted of broiled rabbits, olives, rice, and *bacalao*, with wine—stolen of course—to wash it down. He took his share of the viands seated by a fire, around which the ragged wayfarers crowded, male and female; but he was very well pleased when he took his departure from these singular people, who would not accept of a single maravedi for his entertainment.

Near midnight he arrived at the village of Roncesvalles, which consists of one straggling street, closed by an arched gateway at each end. The barriers were shut, and no admittance was given. He thundered loudly, first at one gate and then at the other; but he was unheard or uncared for by the drowsy porters, who occupied the houses above the arches. He therefore prepared to pass the night in the open air, which, although nothing new to a campaigner, was sufficiently provoking on that occasion, especially as a shower was beginning to descend, and sheet lightning, red and flaming, shot at times across the distant sky, revealing the peaks of the mountains, and the moaning voice of the wind announced a tempestuous night. Wishing the warders of Roncesvalles in a hotter climate than Spain, he looked about for some place of shelter, and perceived, not far off, a solitary little chapel, or oratory, which was revealed by the pale altar-lights twinkling through its tinted windows and open doorway.

In this rude edifice he resolved to take shelter, rather than pass the night in the open air; and just as he gained its arched porch, the storm, which had long been threatening, burst forth with sudden and appalling fury. The wind howled in the pass, and swept over the mountains like a tornado, and with a terrible sound, as if, in the words of a Gaelic bard, the spirits of the storm were shrieking to each other. The forked lightning shot athwart the sky, cleaving the masses of cloud, and the rattling rain thundered furiously on the chapel roof and windows, as if to beat the little fabric to the earth. His horse was startled by the uproar of the elements, and snorted, grew restive, and shot fire from his prominent eyes as the passing gleams illuminated the porch, within which Stuart had stabled him by fastening the bridle to the figure of an old saint or apostle that presided over a stone font, from which the old troop-horse soon sucked up the holy water. Ronald wrapped a cloak round him, and flung himself on the stone pavement of the chapel, to rest his aching limbs, which were beginning to stiffen with so long a journey on horseback.

The building was totally destitute of ornament, and its rude construction gave evidence of its great antiquity. There were several shrines around it, with wax tapers flickering before them, revealing the strange little monsters in wood or stone which represented certain saints. In front of one of these knelt a stout, but wild-looking Spanish peasant, devoutly praying and telling over his chaplet. The entrance of Stuart caused him hurriedly to start,—to snatch his broad-leaved hat from the floor, to grasp the haft of his dagger, and glance round him with frowning brow and eyes gleaming with apprehension. But on perceiving the uniform of the intruder, his dark features relaxed into a smile; he bowed his head politely, and resumed his orisons, which Stuart never interrupted, although they lasted for a weary hour. There was something very grotesque in the aspect of one particular image, which appeared to be thrust unceremoniously into a dark niche, where no taper burned; from which Ronald inferred that the saint had no worshippers, or was not a favourite in the neighbourhood of Roncesvalles. The appearance of the image was calculated to excite

laughter and derision, rather than piety or awe. It resembled the figure of Johnny Wilkes or Guy Fawkes, rather than a grim and ghostly saint. The effigy was upwards of six feet high, and had a painted mask, well bewhiskered, and surmounted by a cocked hat. It was arrayed in leather breeches and jack-boots, a blue uniform coat, and tarnished epaulets. A sash encircled its waist, and in it were stuck a pair of pistols and a sabre. Its *tout ensemble* was quite ludicrous, as it stood erect in the gloomy niche of the solemn little chapel, and was seen by the "dim religious light" of distant tapers.

With the hilt of his broad-sword under his head for a pillow, Stuart lay on the pavement, and viewed this singular apparition with considerable amusement; and if he restrained a violent inclination to laugh, it was only from a reluctance to offend the peasant, who was praying before an image which, by its long robe and bunch of rusty keys, seemed meant for a representation of San Pedro.

From the devotee, who, when his prayers were ended, seated himself by his side, Stuart learned that the strange image represented St. Anthony of Portugal, one of those redoubtable seven champions whose "history" has made such a noise in the world from time immemorial. Notwithstanding the mist which ignorance, superstition, and priestcraft had cast over his mind, the sturdy *paisano* laughed till the chapel rang again at the appearance of the Portuguese patron, and acquainted Stuart with some pleasant facts, which accounted for the military garb of the saint. By virtue of a decree in that behalf on the part of his holiness, St. Anthony was, in 1706, formally *enlisted* into the Portuguese army; and in the same year received the rank of captain,—so rapid was his promotion. His image was always clad in successive uniforms as he was hurried through the different grades, until he reached the rank of Marshal-general of the armies of Portugal and Algarve, a post which, I believe, he yet holds, with a pension of one hundred and fifty ducats per annum, which every year is punctually deposited, in a splendid purse, in the Chapel-Royal, by the Portuguese sovereign. Awful was the wrath, and terrible were the denunciations and holy indignation, when a cannon-ball carried off the head and cocked hat of the unfortunate image, which had been placed in an open carriage on one occasion, when *commanding* the Portuguese army in battle.

The image in the chapel at Roncesvalles had been placed there by the soldiers of the Condé d'Amarante's brigade, the condé himself furnishing the saint with some of his cast uniform; but, since the departure of the Portuguese, the shrine had been totally deserted, as no true Spaniard would bend his knee to a Lusitanian saint. Such was the account given by the peasant, and it illustrates rather oddly the religious feelings of the Portuguese. After sharing together the contents of a flask of brandy, with which Ronald had learned to provide himself, they composed themselves to sleep. The peasant, who had also been shut out of Roncesvalles, drew his broad *sombrero* over his dusky visage, and, wrapping his brown mantle around him, laid his head against the base of a column, and fell fast asleep. Those suspicions which a long intercourse with Spaniards had taught Stuart to entertain of every casual acquaintance, kept him for some time from sleep. He narrowly watched his olive-cheeked companion, and it was not until, from his hard breathing, he was sure he slept, that he too resigned himself to the drowsy deity. He awoke about sunrise, and found that his companion had departed. A sudden misgiving shot across his mind, and he sprang to the porch to look for his horse, which stood there, fair and sleek, as he left him on the preceding evening. He took him by the bridle, and advanced towards Roncesvalles.

The storm, and all traces of it, had passed away. The sky was clear and

sunny, and the distant mountains mingled with its azure. The air was laden with rich perfume from little shrubs, of which I know not the name, but which flourish everywhere over the Peninsula; and every bush and blade of grass glittered like silver with the moisture which dedewed them. The gates of Roncesvalles stood open, and passing through one of the archways, Ronald asked the first person he met whether there was an inn, *café*, *taberna*, or any house of entertainment, where he could procure refreshment for himself and horse, but was informed that the wretched mountain-village could boast of none. The man to whom he spoke was a miserably-clad peasant, and, like most Spanish villagers, appeared to belong to no trade or profession. He was returning from the public fountain with water, which he carried on his head, in a huge brown jug. He seemed both surprised and pleased to be accosted by a British officer, and said that if the noble *caballero* would honour him by coming to his house, he would do his best to provide refreshment. This offer Stuart at once accepted, and placing a dollar in the hand of the *aguadore*, desired him to lead the way. After seeing his horse fed and watered, and after discussing breakfast, which consisted of a miserable mess of milk, peas, goat's-flesh, and roasted *castanos*, he mounted, and again went forth on his mission, glad to leave Roncesvalles far behind him. He expected to reach Elizondo before night; but soon found that his horse had become so jaded and worn out, that the hope was vain. The pace of the animal had become languid and slow; his eyes had lost their fire, and his neck and ears began to droop.

That he might advance faster, Stuart was fain to lead him by the bridle up the steep and winding tracks by which his journey lay. Once only Egypt showed some signs of his former spirit. In a narrow dell between two hills, in a rugged gorge like the bed of a departed river, an iron howitzer and a few shells lay rusting and half sunk in the earth; close by lay the skeletons of a man and a horse, adding sadly to the effect of the naked and silent wilderness around. At the sudden sight of these ghastly objects lying among the weeds and long grass, the steed snorted, shied, and then sprung away at a speed which soon left the dell, and what it contained, miles behind.

As he rode through a solitary place, Stuart was startled on perceiving a party of men, to the number of fifteen or twenty, all well armed and on horseback, rising as it seemed from the earth, or appearing suddenly above the surface successively, as spectres rise through the stage. The fellows were all gaily attired in gaudy jackets, red sashes, and high-crowned hats; but the appearance of their arms, a long Spanish gun slung over the back, a cutlass, and double brace of pistols, together with various packages of goods with which their horses were laden, gave them the aspect of a band of robbers. Stuart thought of the gang of Captain Rolando, as he saw them appearing from the bowels of the earth, within about twenty paces of where he stopped his horse. He next thought of his own safety, and had drawn forth his pistols, when one of the strangers perceiving him, waved his hat, crying, "*Amigos, senor, amigos!*" and, to put a bold face on the matter, Ronald rode straight towards him. They proved to be a party of *contrabandistas*, travelling to Vittoria with a store of chocolate, soap, butter, cigars, &c., which they had been purchasing in France. A sort of hatchway, or trap-door, of turf was laid over the mouth of the cavern from which they arose; after which they set off at full speed for Errazu.

Ronald was very well pleased to see them depart, as *contrabandistas* are, at best, but indifferent characters, although few travellers are more welcome at Spanish inns, where they may generally be seen at the door, or in

the yard, recounting to their laughing auditors strange tales of adventures which they had encountered in the course of their roving and romantic life; and, as they are always gaily attired, they are generally favourites with the peasant girls on the different roads they frequent. Their cavern, which Ronald felt a strong wish to explore, was probably some deserted mine, or one of those subterranean abodes dug by the Spaniards in the days of the Moors, and now appropriated by these land-smugglers as a place for holding their wares. Had Ronald worn any other garb than that of a British officer, the contraband gentry might, by an ounce bullet, have secured for ever his silence regarding their retreat, but they well knew that it mattered not to him: so, after an interchange of a few civilities and cigars, they rode off at a gallop, without once looking behind them.

As he proceeded on his way, the scenery became more interesting, the landscape being interspersed with all that can render it beautiful. A ruined chapel towered on a green eminence above a tufted grove, through which swept a brawling mountain torrent, spanned by a pointed arch; while a cascade appeared below, where the stream, grappling and jarring with the rocks that interrupted its course, rushed in a sheet of foam to a cleft in the earth many feet beneath. Around were groves of the olive-tree, with its soft green leaves and bright yellow flowers; and beyond was Errazu, with its vine-covered cottages, its larger mansions of brick and plaster, with heavy tiled roofs and broad projecting eaves, its great old monastery and its church spire, the vane of which was gleaming in the light of the setting sun. As he was travelling on duty, Stuart was entitled to billets; he therefore set about procuring one. The alcalde was at confession, and the *escrivano*, to whom he applied, gave him orders for a quarter in the house of a solitary widow lady, who, with her daughter, resided in a lonely house at the end of the town.

Considering their circumstances, this was the last house upon which a billet should have been given; but the escrivano had a piece of revenge to gratify. The old lady was a widow of a syndic,—a magistrate chosen by the people, like the Roman tribunes,—who, during his whole life, had been at feud with him, and the escrivano hoped that Stuart's being billeted there would give rise to some pleasant piece of scandal, for the benefit of the gossiping old maids and duennas of Errazu.

The appearance of the widow's mansion did not prepossess Ronald much in its favour. The French had not left Errazu unscathed on their retreat through it; and, like many others, the domicile of Donna Aminta della Ronda showed signs of their vindictive feeling. One half had suffered from fire, and was in ruins; but two apartments were yet habitable, and into one of these Stuart was shown by an aged and saffron-coloured female domestic, to whom he presented the billet-order, by which he was entitled to occupy the best room and best bed in the house. The chamber, which was paved with tiles, was on the ground-floor; the window was glazed, but the walls were in a deplorable state of dilapidation; and many choice pieces of French wit appeared scribbled on various parts of the plaster. Among other things was a copy of verses addressed to Donna Aminta, written in rather indelicate French, and signed "M. de Mesmai, 10th Cuirassiers, or Devil's Own," which informed Stuart that his former acquaintance had once occupied that apartment.

Two antique chairs, high-backed and richly carved, a massive oak table, and a brass candlestick, composed the furniture. A chamber, containing an old-fashioned bed, with crimson feathers and hangings, opened out of this apartment, with which it communicated by means of an arch, from which the French had torn the door, probably for fuel. But this snug couch did not appear destined for Stuart, as the old domestic laid a

paillasse upon the tiled floor for his use; and placing wine, cigars, and a light upon the table, laid the poker and shovel crosswise, and withdrew, leaving him to his own reflections.

He was somewhat displeased at not being received by the ladies in person, especially as the escrivano had informed him, with a sly look, that the youngest possessed considerable attractions; but consoling himself with the wine and cigars, he resolved to care not a jot about their discourtesy. After he had amused himself by thoroughly inspecting every nook and corner of the room, and grown weary of conning over the "History of the famous Preacher, Friar Gerund de Campazas," which he found when ransacking the bed-closet, he began to think of retiring to rest. He debated with himself for a moment which berth to take possession of, because by his billet he was entitled to the best bed the house contained; and the four-post and paillasse seemed the very antipodes of each other. But his doubts were resolved at once by the sudden entrance of the ladies, who sailed into the room with their long trains and flowing veils, and bowing, coldly bid him "*Buena noche, senor!*" as they retired to their bed-room. Ye gods! a bed-room destitute of door, and a foreign *oficial* to sleep in the next room! Stuart was puzzled, dumb-foundered in fact, and his Scottish modesty was quite shocked. But, lighting another cigar, he affected to read very attentively "Friar Gerund de Campazas," and wondered how all this was to end; while the ladies, favoured by the gloom of the chamber, undressed and betook themselves to their couch, around which they drew the dark and massive folds of the drapery. Ronald laid down the book, and stared about him. There was something very peculiar in the affair, and it outdid the most singular Spanish stories he had ever heard related, even at the mess.

The elder lady had nothing very enchanting about her, certainly; but Ronald's keen eye had observed that the young donna had a melting black Spanish eye, a cherry lip, and white hand. He thought of these things and glanced furtively towards the mysterious closet, where the black outline of the couch, surmounted by its plumage, seemed like that of a hearse or mausoleum. Not a sound came from it after Donna Aminta had mumbled her *ave!* but the trampling of heavy feet arrested Stuart's attention; the door opened, and two tall and muscular Spaniards entered. One wore a broad hat, with a sprig of *romero* stuck in the band of it, as a guard against evil spirits and danger. The other wore a long cap of yellow cotton. They were shirtless and shoeless, and their ragged cotton breeches and *zamarra* jackets displayed, through various holes, their dark and swarthy skin, giving them a wild and savage appearance, which their brown bull-like necks and ferocious visages, fringed with masses of dark hair, did not belie. As usual, each was girt about the middle by a yellow sash; but, stuck in it, each had a dagger and brace of pistols. They were beetle-browed and most cut-throat looking fellows. At first sight Ronald knew them to be *valientes*,—villains whose poniards are ever at the service of any base employer who pays well. He started up on their entering, and drew his sword an inch or so from the sheath. The fellows smiled grimly at the demonstration; upon which, he inquired sternly the reason of their intrusion, and why thus armed?

"Donna Aminta can best answer your questions," answered one fellow with surly impudence, as they swaggered into the bed-chamber. With his hand on his claymore Ronald strode towards them.

"Stand, senor cavalier!" said the one who had spoken; "stand! We seek not to quarrel with you; but life is sweet, and if we are set upon—You understand us: the good lady shall see that we are worthy of our wages. We mount guard on her chamber: cross this line," added he,

drawing one on the tiles with his poniard; "cross this line, and, *Santo demonio!* we will whet our daggers on your back-bone."

Insolent as this reply was, Stuart resolved to put up with the affront rather than come to blows with two desperadoes, whose fire-arms gave them such advantage. He deeply regretted that he had left his loaded pistols in the holsters of the saddle; and remembering that he was alone, and among jealous strangers, he thought that a brawl would be well avoided. The bravoes seated themselves on the floor within the ladies' chamber, and remained perfectly quiet, without stirring or speaking, but their fierce dark eyes seemed to be watching the stranger keenly. Ronald retired to his paillasse, and laid his drawn dirk and claymore beside him, ready to grasp them on the least alarm. He remained watching the intruders by the light of the candle, until it flickered down in the socket and expired, leaving the place involved in deep gloom. The silence of the chamber was broken only by the real or pretended snoring of these modern Cids, who had so suddenly become the guardians of the ladies' bower. When he first committed himself to his miserable couch, Ronald had determined to lie awake; but, growing weary of listening and watching in the dark, he dropped insensibly asleep, and did not awaken until the morning was far advanced. The instant sleep departed from his eyelids, the remembrance of last night flashed upon his memory. He rose and looked about him. The bravoes had withdrawn; the ladies also were gone, and the couch was tenantless. Sheathing his weapons, he drained the wine-jar; and snatching up his bonnet, he departed from the house unseen by its inmates, whom he bequeathed to the devil for their discourtesy.

Fetching his horse from the stable of the *escrivano*, where he had left it overnight, he again resumed his journey, feeling heartily tired of Spain, and wishing himself again at Toulouse, where his comrades were awaiting the order to embark.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LADY OF ELIZONDO.

A RIDE of a few leagues brought Stuart to Elizondo. On entering the market-place, two Spanish soldiers, placed as sentinels before the door of a large mansion-house, attracted his attention. He was informed that it was the residence of the Condé Penne Villamur. It stood at the corner of the old market-place, to which one of its fronts looked; the other faced the *Puerta del Sol*, where the superior classes of the inhabitants met to promenade and converse, between ten and twelve in the forenoon.

He dismounted, and, ascending a splendid staircase, was ushered into a handsome apartment, the lofty ceiling of which was covered with antique carving and gilding. As usual in Spanish houses, the furniture was very antique, and the chairs and hangings were of damask cloth. The condé, a grim old fellow, whose grey wiry moustaches were turned up to the tops of his ears, lay back in an easy chair, with his legs stretched out lazily at full length under the table, upon which stood wine-decanters and fruit, &c. &c. A young lady, either his wife or daughter, sat in that part of the room where the floor was raised, as if for a throne, about a foot above the rest. She sat working at a new mantilla, which she was embroidering on a frame. Her feet were placed on the wooden rail of a *brasero*, or pan filled with charcoal, which rendered the atmosphere of the room very unpleasant to one unaccustomed to such an uncomfortable contrivance. When Stuart entered, the senora merely bowed, and continued her work, blushing as

young ladies generally do when a handsome young officer appears unexpectedly. The count snatched from his face the handkerchief which during his *siesta* had covered it, and bowed twice or thrice with the most formal gravity of an old Castilian, stooping until the bullion epaulets of his brown regimentals became reversed. Stuart delivered the despatch with which he had ridden so far, wondering what it might contain. The condé handed him a chair and a glass of Malaga; after which he begged pardon, and proceeded to con over the papers, without communicating their contents. But in consequence of the complacent smile which overspread and unbent his grim features, Ronald supposed that the envelope contained only some complimentary address to the Spanish forces. And he was right in his conjecture, as, six months afterwards, he had the pleasure, or rather displeasure, of perusing it in a number of the *Gaceta de la Regencia*.

"*Diavolo!*" thought he, as he bowed to *la senora*, and emptied his glass, "have I ridden from the Garonne to the Pyrenees with a paper full of staff-office nonsense!"

Villamur read over the document two or three times, often begging pardon for the liberty he took; and after inquiring about the health of Lord Wellington, and discussing the probabilities of having a continuance of fine weather, as if he kept a score of barometers and thermometers, he ended by a few other common-place observations, and covering up his face with his handkerchief, began to relapse insensibly into the dozing and dreamy state from which Stuart had roused him. Irritated at treatment so different from what he expected, and which an officer of the most trusty ally of Spain deserved, Ronald at once rose, and bowing haughtily to the lady, withdrew; the condé coolly permitting him to do so, saying, that Micer Bartolmé, the alcalde, who kept the faro-table opposite, would give him an order for a billet.

"Confound his Spanish pride, his insolence, presumption, and ingratitude!" thought Stuart, bitterly. "'Tis a pretty display of hospitality this, to one who has looked on the slaughter of Vittoria, of Orthez, and Toulouse! But my duty is over, thank Heaven! and to-morrow my horse's tail will be turned on this most grateful soil of Spain."

Micer Bartolmé expressed much joy at the sight of the red coat, and would have invited the wearer to remain in his own house, probably for the purpose of fleecing him at faro; but it so happened that, at the moment, he was not exactly master of his own premises. His good lady had just brought him a son and heir, ten minutes before Ronald's arrival, and the mansion had been taken violent possession of by all the female gossips, wise women, and duennas of Elizondo, by whom the worthy alcalde was treated as a mere intruder, being pushed, ordered, and brow-beaten, until he was fain to quit the field and take up his quarters with his neighbour, an *escrivano*. An order for a billet was therefore given on the mansion of a cavalier, who bore the sounding name of Don Alvarado de Castellon de la Plana, so styled from the place of his birth, the "castle on the plain," an old Moorish town of Valencia.

He received Ronald with all due courtesy, and directed servants to look after the wants of his jaded horse. He was a dissipated but handsome-looking man, about thirty years of age. He wore his hair in long flowing locks, and two short black tufts curled on his upper lip. In its cut, his dress closely resembled that of an English gentleman; but his surtout of green cloth was braided with gold lace, adorned with a profusion of jingling bell-buttons, and girt about the waist by a broad belt, which was clasped by a large buckle, and sustained a short ivory-hilted and silver-sheathed stiletto. A broad shirt-collar, edged with jagged lace, spread over his shoulder, and when his high-flapped Spanish hat was withdrawn, a broad

and noble forehead was displayed; but there was an expression in its contracted lines, which told of a heart stern, proud, and daring. His dark eyebrows were habitually knit, and formed a continued but curved line above his nose; and there was a certain bold and boisterous swagger in his demeanour, which Ronald supposed he had acquired while serving as a cavalier of fortune in the guerilla band of the ferocious Don Julian Sanchez.

In everything the reverse of him appeared his wife, a lady so gentle, so timid, that she scarcely ever raised her soft dark eyes when Ronald addressed her. She was very pale; her soft cheek was whiter than her hand, and contrasted strongly with the hue of her ringlets; and in her beautiful, but evidently withering features, there was such an expression of heart-broken sadness, that she at once won all the sympathy and compassion which Stuart's gallant heart was capable of yielding. Her husband, for some reasons known only to himself, treated her with a marked coldness and even harshness, which he cared not to conceal, even before their military guest.

The poor timid woman seemed to shrink within herself whenever she found the keen stern eye of Alvarado turned upon her. Often during the evening repast, which had been hastily prepared for Ronald, and with which, in consequence of the host's behaviour, he was disgusted,—often did he feel inclined to smite him on the mouth, for the unkind things which he addressed to his drooping wife.

In truth, they were a singular couple as it had ever been his fortune to meet with. Although there was no duenna about the establishment, thus affording a rare example of love and fidelity in the lady, yet her husband seemed to take a strange and most unmanly pleasure in mortifying her, and endeavouring to render her contemptible in the estimation of the stranger. The latter, although he felt very uncomfortable, affected not to be conscious of Alvarado's conduct, and conversed with ease on various topics, and generally of the long war which had been so successfully terminated. When the meal was ended, Donna Ximena bowed, and faltering out "*Addios, senores! buena noche!*" withdrew, leaving her ungracious husband and his guest over their wine.

Over his flasks of rich *Ciudad Real* the don grew animated, and retailed many anecdotes of scenes he had witnessed, and adventures in which he had borne a part, while serving with Don Julian Sanchez. Some of these stories he would have done well to have suppressed, as they would have baffled even the imagination of the most bloody-minded romancer to conceive. But a revengeful and hot-brained Spaniard surpasses every other man in cruelty. He said that, like the parents of Julian Sanchez, his father, mother, and sister had been murdered by the French, and on their graves he had sworn by cross and dagger to revenge them; and terribly had he kept his formidable vow. During the whole of the war of independence, he had never yielded quarter or mercy, but put the wounded and captives to that death which he said their atrocities deserved. He boasted that his stiletto had drunk the blood of a hundred hearts, and in support of many avowals of instances of particular ferocity, he cited the *Gaceta de Valencia*, in the columns of which, he said, his deeds and patriotism had all been duly extolled. Disgusted with his host, and the strange tenor of his conversation, Ronald soon withdrew to rest, pleading as an excuse for so doing, his desire to commence his journey to Toulouse early on the morrow, which he must needs do, if he would be in time for the embarkation of his regiment.

The furniture and ornaments of his sleeping apartment were richer and more beautiful than he could have expected them to be on the southern

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side of the Pyrenees; but the plunder of Gascon châteaux, when guerilla bands made occasional descents to the north, served to replenish many of the mansions that had been ravaged and ruined by the troops of France when retreating. The bed-hangings were of white satin, fringed with silver; the chairs were covered with crimson velvet, and yet bore on the back the gilded coat-armorial of some French family. A splendid clock, covered by a glass, ticked upon an antique mantel-piece of carved cedar; and several gloomy portraits of severe-looking old cavaliers, in the slashed doublets, high ruffs, and peaked beards worn in Spain a hundred years before, hung around the walls. The tall casemented windows came down to the tiles of the floor, and through the half open hangings were seen the bright stars, the blue sky, the long dark vistas of the tiled roofs, and the church-spire of Elizondo.

On the table stood a showy Parisian lamp, surmounted by the Eagle of the Emperor, which spread its gilt wings over a rose-coloured glass globe. from which a soft light was diffused through the apartment. Throwing himself into an easy chair with a most *nonchalant* manner, Stuart made a careless survey of the place.

"Well, Ronald Stuart; truly this is a snug billet!" he soliloquized, as he placed his feet on the rail of the charcoal *brasero*, which smouldered and glowed on the hearth. "Rich in the plunder of France, 'tis as splendid a billet as Campbell's could have been, when quartered in the harem of Alexandria. But assuredly this Alvarado de—de Castellon de la Plana is, by his own account, one of the most savage rascals unhung in Spain; and yet I am his guest, and am to sleep beneath his roof for this night. And then Donna Ximena,—by Jove! was that gentle creature mine, how I would love and cherish her! Her rogue of a husband deserves to be flogged, and pickled afterward!"

His eye fell on the timepiece, the hour-hand of which pointed to eleven, and he began to think of retiring. Unbuckling his weapons, he laid them on a chair at the bedside, to be at hand in case of any alarm; and then, with the caution of an old soldier, he turned to examine the means of securing the door, which was furnished with a strong but rude iron bolt, which he shot into its place.

Two persons, whom for some time past he had heard conversing in an adjoining room, now suddenly raised their voices.

"It shall be so. I tell you, Senor Don Alvarado—"

"Peace! Would you awaken the cavalier in the next room?"

"And who is he?" cried the other furiously; "this cavalier, of whom you have spoken thrice, who is *he?* But it matters not: let him keep his ears to himself, if he is given to lie awake. Listeners seldom hear aught that is pleasant for themselves. Said you an officer of Wellington's army? He, too, shall die, if he ventures to cross my path this night!"

"Carlos! Madman! Let me beseech you not to raise your voice thus!" entreated Alvarado in a whisper.

But Stuart had heard more than enough to whet his curiosity. Indeed, owing to the tenor of those observations,—of which he had been an involuntary listener,—he considered himself entitled to sift the matter to the utmost. Examining the partition, which consisted only of lath and plaster, he discovered, near the ceiling, a small hole in the stucco cornice which surrounded the top of the wall.

"Stratagems are fair in war," thought he, as he mounted upon a side table and placed his eye to the orifice, through which he obtained a complete survey of the next apartment. A lustre hung from the roof, and its light revealed Alvarado and Don Carlos Avallo,—a young cavalier, about three-and-twenty years of age, whom he remembered to have met at Aran-

juez and other places. Alvarado, who was entreating him to lower his voice, was standing half undressed,—at least without his vest, doublet, and girdle, as if he had been preparing for rest when disturbed by the visit of Avallo, who appeared to have entered by the window, which stood half open. A short but graceful Spanish mantle enveloped the left side of this young cavalier, who wore his broad hat pulled over his face; but his fierce dark eyes flashed and gleamed brightly beneath its shade, like those of a tiger in the dark; and when at times the rays of light fell on his swarthy cheek, it seemed inflamed with rage, while his teeth were clenched, and his lips pale and quivering. He kept his left hand free from the folds of his velvet mantle, but his fingers grasped tremblingly the hilt of a poniard, which appeared with a brace of pistols in his embroidered girdle. A gold crucifix glittered on his breast, and a long black feather, fastened in the band of his hat, floated gracefully over his left shoulder. He appeared a striking and romantic figure as he stood confronting Alvarado, with his proud head drawn back and his right foot placed forward, while he surveyed the proprietor of the mansion with eyes keen and fiery, and with rage and unutterable scorn bristling on every hair of his smart moustaches.

"Look you, Alvarado," said he, after a very long pause; "I will not be trifled with! *Santos!* my dagger is likely to punch an unhappy hole in the old friendship we have so often vowed to each other over our cups at Salamanca, if we come not to some terms this very night. Beard o' the Pope, senor! I am not now the simple student I was then. Alvarado! you know me. This night, then—"

"There is but one hour of it to run," observed the other in a deprecating tone. "There is but one hour—"

"Time enough, and to spare, then, thou base juggler!"

"What would you have, insolent?" said Alvarado fiercely, as he closed the casement with violence. "To-morrow I will meet you in the pass of Lanz, and there, with pistols, with sword, or with dagger, I will yield you that satisfaction for which you have such a craving."

The other laughed scornfully. "No, no, my blustering guerilla! such a meeting will not suit my purpose. Every drop of blood in the veins of your body would not wash away the insult you are likely to cast upon the name of Avallo by means of this poor sister of mine. Hear me, Don Alvarado! and hear me for the last time! I tell you that my sister has been wronged,—basely wronged and betrayed by you! I want not your blood; but do my sister justice, or, by the bones of Rodrigo! I will make all Spain ring with the tidings of Avallo's vengeance!"

"How!" said the other sullenly; "do her justice?"

"Wed her,—ay, before this week is out!"

"A week is a short time, Senor Carlos; and you forget that Ximena is likely to live for many months yet," said the other with a grim smile. "Marry Elvira? Fool! the cursed trammels of one unhappy marriage are wound around me already."

"You are a Spaniard, senor,—my friend," replied Avallo scornfully, "and can easily find some means to break these trammels you speak of. Thanks to our sunny clime, the yoke of blessed matrimony sits lightly on our necks. This little chit of Asturia, your wife, shall not long be a bar in the way of righting my sister's honour."

"Ximena—"

"Let her die!" said the young desperado, with a thick voice of concentrated passion; "let her die this very night—this very hour! She is a desolate woman. Should her death be suspected, who shall avenge her? All her kindred perished when the French sacked Madrid. Shall she take her departure to a better place to-night, then?"

"Villain!" exclaimed Alvarado, flinging away from him; "speak again of that, and I will slay you where you stand!"

"Pooh!" replied the other with contempt. "I have three trusty mates within cry, whose daggers would slash to ribands every human being your house contains; so talk gently of slaying, senor. By *Santiago!* if it needs must be, all Spain shall know that Don Carlos Avallo is a cavalier as jealous of his sister's honour and of his own name, as any hidalgo between Portugal and the Pyrenees. Do you still scruple? See the hand of the clock approaches to the twelfth hour."

"Hush, devil and tempter! I tell you you are the veriest villain in Spain!"

"Hah! I now remember. Most worthy Don Alvarado, I suppose I must acquaint my uncle the prime-minister with the name of the traitor who betrayed to the savage Mazzachelli, the Italian follower of Buonaparte, the long-defended town of Hostalrich, that he might obtain revenge by meanly destroying its governor, the brave Don Julian de Estrada. I have to say but two words of this matter to the minister at Madrid, and, Alvarado, thou art a lost man!"

Alvarado's large eyes gleamed with vindictive fury, while his olive cheek grew pale as death.

"A craven cavalier, truly!" continued the ferocious Avallo, regarding him with a countenance expressive of stern curiosity, and cool, but triumphant derision. "*Hombre!* you know that I have heard of that misdeed of yours; and should I breathe but a word abroad about the unpleasant fact, your ample estates will be pressed into the royal purse, and your neck in the ring of the *garrotte*, as surely as my name is Avallo. Choose, then," said he, in a deliberate tone; "choose, then, between utter destruction and the death of this pale-faced Ximena. The beauty of Elvira will make you ample amends. Her beauty—But you have already judged of that, Senor Trinquero," he added bitterly.

"Wine, or something else, has made you mad," said the other, with an attempt to be bold. "Think not that I will permit you to lord it over me thus. And as for that affair you spoke of—Hostalrich—something more will be requisite than the mere assertion of a subaltern of the Castel Blazo regiment, to destroy the hard-won honour and doubloons of such a cavalier as myself."

"Perfectly reasonable," said the other, scornfully. "Three different letters, written by you to Mazzachelli, and dated from Hostalrich, are abundant proof. I found them on the road-side near Vittoria, amidst a wilderness of papers; and now they are in the safe strong-box of a certain lawyer, subtle as the devil himself."

Alvarado sunk into a chair, and covered his face with his hands, to hide the rage and mortification which distorted it.

"Hostalrich! Hah! 'twas a brave siege that!" said his tormentor, contemplating his dismay with a triumphant smile. "And then poor Don Julian to be so basely betrayed, after all his chivalric defence and deeds of arms! But to return. Ximena,—is not her chamber at the end of the gallery?"

"It is," faltered the other.

"'Tis well," replied Avallo, striking his hand on the casement. The dark figure of a stranger appeared in the balcony outside the window. After a few moments' conference he withdrew.

"Let us only keep quiet," said he, turning a little pale, as he extinguished the lights in the lustre. "Retire to bed, Senor Alvarado, who is soon to become the husband of Elvira Avallo. Sleep sound, for Ximena will be found cold in the morning; and see that, in the critical hour of

discovery, your wonted cunning fails you not. Show grief, and rage, and tears; you understand me? *Diavolo!* I hope your walls are built substantially. Should the guest who occupies the next room have overheard us, all is lost. But I have arranged for him. To make sure of his silence, Narvaez Cifuentes shall waylay him among the mountains at Roncesvalles, where even the sword of Roland would fail to aid him now-a-days."

While the cavalier, probably to keep up the courage of his companion, continued to speak away in loud and incautious tones, Stuart descended from his eminence, where, with considerable repugnance, he had acted the eaves-dropper so long; and drawing his sword, advanced to the room-door. In his eagerness to unfasten it, the handle of the bolt broke, leaving it still in its place; and the door remained shut and immovable. A cold perspiration burst over Ronald's brow. The life of the poor lady seemed to hang but by a hair.

"What evil spirit crosses me now?" he muttered. "A moment like this may cause the repentance of a lifetime. Ah, assassins! I shall mar you yet." Unsheathing his dirk, he applied it to the iron plate on which the bolt ran in a groove. He attempted to wrench it off: the thick blade of the long dagger bent like whalebone, and threatened every instant to snap, while the envious and obstinate bolt remained firm as a rock.

A cry—a shrill and wailing cry, which was succeeded by a gurgling groan, arose from the end of the corridor. The fate of Ximena was sealed! Grown desperate, Stuart rushed against the door, and applying his foot, sent frame, panels, and everything flying along the passage in fifty fragments. A lustre of coloured lamps, which hung from the ceiling, revealed to him Donna Ximena in her night-dress, rushing from an opposite door. Her long black hair was unbound, and streamed down her uncovered back and bosom, the pure white of which was stained with blood, that had also drenched her linen vest and wrapper. These were her only attire. A villain, wearing a dark dress, and having his face concealed by a black velvet mask, was in pursuit; and, catching her by her long flowing hair, at the very moment of her escape from the door, dashed her shrieking to the earth with his left hand, while the short stiletto which armed his right was twice buried in her neck and bosom. Almost at the same moment the long double-edged broad-sword of the Highlander was driven through his body, and, wallowing in blood, the stricken bravo sunk beside the warm and yet quivering corpse of his victim. His comrade escaped, and Ronald, disdaining again to strike, withdrew slowly his dripping blade, and placed his foot upon his neck.

"Hah? Senor Narvaez!" said he. "Devil incarnate? the murder of Donna Catalina and the wound at Merida are revenged now; and 'tis happily from my hand you have received the earthly punishment due to your crimes."

He tore the visor from the face of the bleeding man, and, to his equal disappointment and surprise, beheld, not the rascal visage of Cifuentes, but the fierce and forbidding countenance of one that might well have passed for his brother. Death and malice were glaring in his yellow eyes, and his features were horribly distorted by the agony he endured. By this time the whole household were alarmed, and servants, male and female, came rushing to the place with consternation and horror imprinted on their features. The aged *contador* of the mansion appeared in his trunk-breeches and nightcap, armed with a dagger and ferule; the fat old bearded butler came to the scene of action clad only in his doublet and shirt, and grasping, for defence, a couple of pewter flasks by the neck: the other servants bore knives, stilettoes, pikes, spits, and whatever weapons chance had thrown in their way.

On beholding their lady dead on the floor, a man dying beside her, and Stuart standing over them with a crimson weapon in his hand, they uttered a shout, and prepared for a general assault. A bloody engagement might have commenced, when the villanous Don Alvarado appeared, with dismay and grief so strongly imprinted on his countenance, that Stuart was almost inclined to doubt the evidence of his own senses, and to believe the conversation with Carlos Avallo must have been a dream. He looked around for that worthy hidalgo; but, on the first alarm, he had vanished through the window of Alvarado's room. The last-named gentleman seemed inclined to impute the whole affair to Stuart, and a serious tumult would unquestionably have ensued, had not a party of the Alava regiment, who formed the guard on the Condé Villamur's house, arrived with fixed bayonets, and carried off all the inmates prisoners. Perceiving Ronald's uniform, the serjeant commanding the escort desired him to retain his sword, and seemed disposed to allow him to depart; but a syndic, with a band of alguazils, burst in with their staves and halberts, and insisted on the whole party being taken to the house of Micer Bartolmé, the alcalde, on the opposite side of the Plaza.

The magistrate was clamorously roused from bed, and forced to take his seat and hear the case. He was very sulky at being disturbed, and, seated in his easy chair, wrapped a blanket around him, and frowned with legal dignity on all in the crowded apartment. Ronald felt considerable anxiety for the issue of the affair, as all present seemed disposed to consider him guilty; and he certainly had no ambition to die a martyr to their opinions. The dead body of Ximena de Morla was deposited on the floor. Her cheek was yet of a pale olive colour; but all her skin that was bare,—her neck, bosom, arms, and ankles, were white as the new-fallen snow, and beautifully delicate. A mass of dark curls and braids fell from her head, and lay almost beneath the feet of the pale group around her.

A flickering lamp threw its changeful gleams upon the company, and by its light a clerk sat, pen in hand, to note the proceedings. Every person present being sworn across the blades of two poniards, the examination commenced, each witness stating what he knew in presence of the others. The bravo, having declared that he was dying, called eagerly for a priest, that he might be confessed. Accordingly, a *padre* belonging to a mountain-convent, who happened to be that night in the house, approached slowly, and in no very agreeable mood, for his brain was yet reeling with the fumes of his debauch overnight with the alcalde, who had stripped him of every maravedi at faro. The moaning ruffian lay upon the floor, still and motionless; but the blood fell pattering from his undressed wound upon the damp tiles, while his thick beard and matted hair were clotted with the perspiration which agony had wrung from his frame.

A dead silence was maintained by all in the apartment while the padre knelt over the assassin, and, in the dark corner where he lay, heard his low-muttered confession of crimes, that would have made the hairs on his scalp—had there been any—bristle with horror. Dreadful was the anxiety of the dying wretch, whose coward soul was now recoiling at the prospect of death, and with desperation he clung to the hopes given him by his superstitious faith. Ever and anon he grasped the dark robe, the knotted cord, or the bare feet of the Franciscan, beseeching him to pity, to save, to forgive him: and the accents in which he spoke were terrible to hear. The clerk sat smoking a paper cigar, and scraping away assiduously at a quill, while the alcalde nodded in his chair and fell fast asleep. The alguazils leant on their halberts, and coolly surveyed the company. A murder, which would have filled all Scotland with horror, in Elizondo scarcely created surprise. But the halberdiers were accustomed almost

daily to brawls and deeds of blood, so that their apathy could scarcely be wondered at.

The half-clad servants crowded together in fear, and Ronald stood aloof, regarding with the utmost commiseration the form of the poor Spanish lady, exposed thus in its half-clad state to the gaze of the rude and vulgar. He kept a watchful eye on Alvarado, that he might not, by sign or bribe, cause the padre to put any false colouring on the statements whispered to him by the dying man, when he would have to recapitulate them to the alcalde. The cavalier never dared to look in the direction where his murdered wife lay; but, turning his back upon it, maintained a sulky dignity, and continued to polish with his glove the hilt of his stiletto, seeming, in that futile occupation, to be wholly abstracted from worldly matters, while he muttered scarcely audible threats against the alcalde, the syndic, and their followers, for their interference. The bravo, having handed over to the confessor all his loose change, received in return an assurance of the forgiveness of mother church for all his misdeeds, which seemed to console him mightily. The padre mumbled a little Latin, and assuring him he might die in peace, buttoned his pouch, containing the ill-gotten cash, with a very self-satisfied air. It almost reimbursed the last night's losses at faro. Nevertheless, the terrors of the guilty wretch returned; he moaned heavily, and grasping the skirt of the Franciscan's cassock, besought him earnestly not to leave him in so terrible a moment. He often pressed the friar's crucifix to his lips; and the groans of mental and bodily agony which escaped from them were such as Ronald Stuart had never heard before,—and he had stood on many a battle-field. The bravo believed himself dying, and, at his request, the Franciscan repeated aloud his confession, in which he declared himself guilty of the lady's murder, and exculpated every one, save his comrade Cifuentes, who gave the first stroke, and Don Carlos Avallo, who, for twenty dollars, had secured the service of their daggers,—but for what reason he knew not. He ended by a bitter curse on Stuart, whom he ceased not to revile; and he vowed that, if he could rise from the grave, he would haunt him to the latest day of his existence. Ronald heard the ravings of the wretch with pity, and was very thankful that, in the extremity of his agony and hatred, he had not declared him guilty of the murder of both.

"*Santa Maria de Dios!*" muttered the servants, signing the cross, and shrinking back aghast at the ravings of the wounded man.

"Base scallion!" cried the sleepy magistrate, addressing the assassin, "I will make you pay dearly for disturbing me of my night's rest. Vile *ladron!* the screw of the *garrote* will compress your filthy weasand tighter than you will find agreeable. Take your pen, *senor escrivano*, and write to our dictation a warrant to apprehend, in the king's name, a certain noble cavalier, by name Don Carlos Avallo, for causing the death of this honourable lady. And further—"

He was interrupted by Alvarado, who desired imperiously that he would leave Avallo to be dealt with otherwise; and tossing his purse, which seemed heavy, into the alcalde's lap, he requested him to close this disagreeable business at once.

"*Paix!* as we say at faro,—double or quits; a very noble cavalier!" muttered the partly-tipsy and partly-sleepy alcalde, pocketing the cash without betraying the least emotion. "Ho, senor scribe! give thy warrant to the devil to light his cigar with. *Bueno!* 'tis a drawn game. Dismiss the senors,—the court is broken up."

Bestowing a menacing glance on Stuart, Alvarado withdrew; the alguazils departed, taking the bravo with them, to get his wounds dressed before they hanged him; and the corse of Ximena was borne off by her

female servants, who were loudly bewailing the loss of so good a mistress.

Day had dawned upon this extraordinary court, and its pale light was struggling for mastery with the flame of the lamp, ere the magistrate so abruptly closed the strange investigation. After all that had happened, Ronald could not return to the mansion of Alvarado; but, sending for his horse, at the invitation of the alcalde, and with the permission of the alcalde's lady, he remained that day at their house, as he was too much wearied by the want of sleep to commence his journey at the time he had intended. To Micer Bartolmé he related the conversation he had overheard, and insisted on Don Alvarado's villany being punished, threatening, for that purpose, to wait upon the Condé Penne Villamur, and state to him all that he knew of the matter.

"By doing so, you would not gain anything equal to what you stake,—your life," replied the magistrate quietly, puffing away at a long Cuba the while. "Hark you, *senor oficial;* I wish you no harm, but beware how you cross the path or purposes of Castellon de la Plana. He is a fierce hidalgo, and never spared man or woman in his hate or vengeance; and his gossip, Don Carlos Avallo, is a born devil, a very imp of *Satanas!* I know them both of old, and would fain keep the peace with them, or my place of alcalde would not be worth a rotten *castano.* Think not that I deal with you falsely in saying these things. Heaven knows how many daggers Alvarado's gold may have sharpened against you ere this. His look, as he departed, boded you no good. You are a stranger in the land, and if you will take sound advice, keep close within my house until to-morrow, when you can depart with the padre Giuseppe. He goes by the way of the Maya rock to his convent, and will show you the road to France."

Ronald felt the force of this advice, which was so cunningly imparted, that he never suspected a hidden meaning. But the alcalde, with a treachery not uncommon in Spain, was in communication with Alvarado, who bribed him to detain the stranger until a plan was completed for his ensnarement among the mountains.

Notwithstanding Bartolmé's advice, Stuart often wished, during that irksome day, to enjoy a ramble about Elizondo, but was as often warned that ill-looking *picaros* were evidently watching the house. This information served only to set his blood on fire, and he fretted and fumed like a caged lion, and would have sallied out in spite of the solemn warnings and injunctions, but the magistrate, with a cunning air of affectionate and paternal solicitude, barred his way, and in so kind a manner, that it was impossible to be angry. All this was mere acting. Old Micer Bartolmé and the Franciscan brother were two arrant sharpers and knaves; but Ronald resisted firmly all their attempts to engage him in gambling, and the day was passed without a card or dice being produced, greatly to the chagrin of the friends, who, after having sold the stranger to Alvarado, were desirous to strip him of his last *peseta.*

Next morning, at the old marching time, an hour before daybreak, he quitted Elizondo. He departed at that early hour for the double purpose of "stealing a march" on Alvarado's spies, if any were really planted upon him, and of proceeding expeditiously on his journey. His horse was well refreshed by the delay at Elizondo, and carried him along at a rapid trot. The padre Giuseppe, with whose presence and conversation he could very well have dispensed, jogged on by his side, mounted uneasily upon the hindmost part of a stout ass,—an animal not so much despised in Spain as among us, by whom the large black cross borne by every donkey on its back, is neither remarked nor reverenced. As they passed from the Calle

Mayor into the Plaza, Giuseppe pointed out, jocularly, the body of the dead bravo, still seated upright on the chair of the *garrote*, which was elevated on a scaffold about four feet above the street; and his reverence increased the disgust of his companion by passing several very unfriarly jokes upon the appearance of the corpse.

On quitting Elizondo, they took the direct road for Maya. Stuart made this circuit for the purpose of avoiding any snare laid for him among the mountains by Don Carlos or Alvarado, who well knew how to employ and communicate with those villains who infest every part of Spain. Evil was impending, and he might have escaped it by taking the Roncesvalles road, or had his deceitful companion, the Franciscan, warned him; but for the bribe of a few dollars, Micer Bartolmé had purchased his silence. A few miles from Elizondo they passed a ruinous chapel where some French prisoners had been confined, and, by a strange refinement of cruelty, starved to death by their guards,—the guerillas of old Salvador de Zagala. The floor was yet strewed with the bones of these unfortunates, who fell victims to a savage spirit of retaliation, and almost within sight of the fertile plains of their native country. The Franciscan continued to mutter prayers and make the sign of the cross with affected devotion, while Stuart surveyed the ghastly place with surprise and indignation.

"*La Caza de Dios*," said he, reading the legend on the lintel of the door. "Alas! how it has been desecrated!"

The priest made no reply, but moved onward, kicking with his spurless heels the sounding sides of his *borrica*, leaving Ronald to follow as he pleased.

After riding a few miles further, they stopped at a *quinta*, or country-house, an unusual thing in Spain; and had not the proprietor been a well-known *contrabandista*, it would soon have been sacked and burned by the banditti in the neighbourhood. The owner was absent, but the *patrona* spread before her guests a tolerable repast of *bacallao*, bread of *milho* or Indian corn flour, delightful fresh butter named *manteca*, and garlic, onions, lupines, wine, and cider in abundance; for all of which she would receive nothing but the padre's blessing and a kiss of peace, which the reverend Giuseppe bestowed upon her plump olive cheek with a hearty good will, of which her husband might not have approved had he been consulted.

At Maya Stuart dined with the monks of the Franciscan convent. He had an excellent repast, composed of all the good things which the district could afford. The clergy of every country are certainly ardent lovers of all the good things of this life, however much they may preach and declaim against them. Poor though Spain may be generally, it is within the stout old walls of the gloomy and spacious *convento* that the richest wines, the most delicate fruits, the most tempting viands, and the most massive plate, are ever to be found. Quite the reverse of the humble, dejected, and mortifying begging friars, from whom they took their name, Ronald found the Franciscans of Maya all very jovial fellows, who could laugh until they almost choked, and could push the can about, and give vent at times to a most unclerical oath. Most of them had been serving in the guerilla bands, and at the peace had resumed the cassock and cope, the mass-book and rosary; but the blustering manners acquired under such leaders as Mina and Julian Sanchez, together with the coarse sentiments of the dissolute and irregular lives they had led, appeared continually through their hypocritical airs and the sombre disguise of the cloister. And such as these are the men who are welcomed to every hearth and home in Spain! who are the advisers of the young, the companions of the old, and the confessors

and the spiritual consolers of all, and into whose ears many a female pours the inmost secrets of her heart,—secrets which, perhaps, she would have revealed to no other mortal living!

To pay for his entertainment, Stuart deposited a handful of *pesetas* at the shrine of the Virgin, whose portrait in the niche, padre Giuseppe informed him, was that of the *querida* of the padre abbot. The fairest dame in Maya had sat for it, to please the superior, who now never prayed before any other image. Complimenting the abbot on his taste, Stuart mounted and bade the holy fathers adieu, tired alike of their manners and their cloister-scandal.

He was now riding straight on the road for France. After he passed the rock of Maya, every rood of ground became as familiar to him as the scenery of his native glen. The sun was setting as he entered the pass, and as its light waxed more dim and sombre, his thoughts grew sadder and more gloomy; for all the excitement of war had now passed away, and the kindlier feelings had begun to resume their sway in the heart. He felt an unaccountable melancholy stealing over him, but whether it was caused by a presentiment—a prophetic sense of hidden danger, or by recollections awakened by the surrounding scenery, I know not: probably by the latter.

Poor Alister Macdonald was with him the last time he trod that way so merrily to the strain of the pipe. He was now within a few feet of his tomb, and all the memory of their past friendship came gushing upon his remembrance. He stayed his horse, for a short space, to gaze upon the scene of that contest, so fierce and so bloody, where his brave brigade had fought with a spirit of gallantry and chivalric devotion equalling that of Leonidas and his Spartans. Where the roar of so many thousand muskets had once rung like thunder among the hills, all was now silent. The stillness was broken only by the scream of the wild bird, as, warned by the falling dew and deepening shadows, it winged its way to its eyrie among the rocks.

"Well may the flowerets bloom, and the grass be verdant here!" thought Stuart. "Every foot of ground has been drenched in the blood of the brave!"

The place presented the appearance of an old church-yard which had been shaken by an earthquake. In some places skeletons lay uncovered, and in others the grass grew long and rank above the mounds.

A green stone, with its head of moss, marked the resting-place of Alister, that looked like one of those solitary old graves which, on the Scottish moors, mark the resting-place of a covenanting warrior. The earth which Evan's hands had heaped over it was now covered with long weeds and nettles, waving sadly in the wind as it whistled down the pass. The remnants of uniform, broken weapons, ammunition-paper, and all the usual appurtenances of an old battle-field, lay strewn about. The great cairn raised by the Gordon Highlanders to mark where their officers were buried, cast a long spectral shadow across the ground, for now the broad disk of the sun was just dipping behind the mountains. The scene was gloomy and terrible, and Stuart was scarcely able to repress a shudder as the recollections of the dead came crowding fast and thick upon him. But, bestowing a last look on romantic Spain, the land of bright eyes, of the mantilla, of the dagger, and the guitar, he turned, and rode down the narrow mountain-path to the northward.

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CHAPTER XV.

CIFUENTES.

The night was approaching, and Ronald being anxious to reach Los Alduides, Cambo, or any other village on the route for Toulouse, rode as rapidly as the rough and steep nature of the mountain path would permit. As he descended towards the Lower Pyrenees, the ground became more irregular, and the road at times wound below beetling crags and through narrow gorges, which were scarcely illuminated by the red light from the westward.

Twice or thrice Ronald beheld, or imagined that he beheld, a head, surmounted by a high-crowned and broad-leaved hat, observing his progress from the summit of the rocks skirting a narrow dell through which he rode. This kept him on the alert, and the threatening words of Don Carlos Avallo recurred to him. He halted, drew his saddle-girths tighter, and looked to his pistols, leaving unstrapped the bear-skin which covered the holsters. At the very moment when he was putting his foot in the stirrup to remount, a musket was discharged from the top of a neighbouring cliff, and the ball fell flattened from a rock within a yard of his head. The white smoke was floating upwards through the still air, but no person was visible.

"*Banditti*, by Heaven!" exclaimed the startled and enraged Highlander, as he sprang on the snorting steed. "Farewell, Spain! and may all mischief attend you, from the Pillars of Hercules to these infernal Pyrenees! I wish the Nive rolled between them and me! But if swift hoofs and a stout blade will serve me in peril, I shall be in broad Gascony to-night."

Onward went Egypt at a full gallop, which was soon brought to a stop on his turning an angle of the rocks. Across the narrow pathway a number of men were busily raising a barricade of turf, branches, and earth; but on Ronald's appearance they snatched up their carbines, and leaping up the rocks with the agility of monkeys, disappeared.

"There is an ambush here," muttered Stuart. "Oh! could we but meet on the mountain-side to-night, Senor Avallo, I would teach you a sharp lesson for the time to come. On now! on, for death or life!"

He had very little practice in the true scientific mode of clearing a five-barred gate, but he feared not to leap with any man who ever held a rein; and when riding a Highland shelty at home, had leapt from rock to rock, and from cliff to cliff, over roaring linns, yawning chasms, and gloomy corries, which would have caused the heart of a Lowlander even to thrill with fear. Grasping a steel pistol in each hand, he came furiously down the path, with his belted plaid and ostrich feathers streaming far behind him.

"On, Egypt, on! brave and noble horse!" said he, encouraging the fine old trooper with words of cheer, at the same time goring his flanks with the sharp iron rowels. The steed bounded onward to the desperate leap; and when within a few yards of the barrier, straining every sinew and fibre until they became like iron, he bounded into the air with such velocity, that the rider almost lost his breath, yet sat gallantly, with his head up and his reins low. At that very moment a deadly volley—a cross-fire from more than a dozen muskets—flashed from the dark rocks around. Several balls pierced the body of the horse, which uttered a snorting cry of pain, and Ronald felt it writhe beneath him in the air. Instead of alighting on its hoofs, down it came, thundering with

its forehead on the earth, to the imminent peril of the rider, who adroitly disengaged himself from the stirrups and alighted on his feet, confused, breathless, and almost stunned with the shock, while the noble steed rolled over on its back, and never moved again.

Ronald was now in deadly jeopardy. Headed by Narvaez Cifuentes, a well-armed gang of Spanish desperadoes, nearly forty in number, surrounded him. Although Narvaez took the most active part in their proceedings, he did not appear to be their leader; and Stuart, when he knew that his life was forfeited by his falling into such hands, resolved that they should gain it dearly. He had broken his claymore and lost a pistol in the leap; but with the other he shot dead one assailant, and drawing his long dirk, struck fearlessly amongst them, right and left. He buried the steel claw of his Highland pistol in the head of one fellow, whose only defence was a red cotton *montero*, or cap; and he drove his left-handed weapon so far into the shoulder of another, that it remained as fast as if driven into a log of wood. All this was the work of a moment; but he was, immediately after these exploits, beaten to the earth with the butts of their fire-arms; and a Portuguese dealt him a blow on the head with a *cajado* (a long staff, armed with a knob), which deprived him of all sensation.

When consciousness returned, he found himself lying on the same spot where he had fallen; but the moon was shining brightly, and the banditti were still grouped around him. He had been rifled of his epaulets, his gold cross, and everything of value, save the miniature of Alice Lisle, which, being concealed, had escaped their hands. The contents of the portmanteau lay strewed about, and a Spaniard, in whom he recognised the ferocious young Juan de la Roca, once Mina's follower, was busily occupied in relieving poor Egypt of the encumbrance of his hide, which he did in a most scientific and tanner-like manner. Ronald had presence of mind enough to lie still, fearing that they might destroy him at once if he stirred; but, from what passed among them, he soon discovered that they were well aware he was only stunned when stricken down. Gaspar Alosegui, the powerful Spaniard who had been vanquished in feats of dexterity at Aranjuez by Campbell and Dugald Mhor, was present among the banditti, and, by the deference which was paid to everything he said, appeared to be their *capitan*.

He wore several feathers in his hat, a costly mantle hung on his left shoulder, and several rich daggers and pistols glittered in his sash. His followers were variously attired and armed, but all had their strong muscular feet nearly bare, while their tawny legs, destitute of hose, were exposed to the knee.

Ronald gazed on the detestable Cifuentes with a fiery eye. He remembered all that Catalina had suffered from his barbarity; he remembered, too, the vow he had sworn to Alvaro to revenge her, and his heart beat quick, while he longed to fall upon him and slay him on the instant, and in the midst of his companions in crime.

"I will not now permit him to be slain, since he has fallen alive into our hands," said Alosegui, addressing Narvaez in a decided tone. "He is a gallant soldier, and truly he has fought well for Spain. We have done enough for the doubloons of Avallo; so stand back, Micer Narvaez! He who would smite at the stranger, must do so only through my body!"

"*Angeles y Demonios!*" exclaimed the desperado hoarsely; "I tell you I will have his blood,—ay, and drink it too, even as I would water! We have long been enemies; and 'tis not Gaspar Alosegui that shall rob me of the revenge so dear to every true Spaniard."

"A mad *borrico*, by our Lady del Pilar!" exclaimed Gaspar, interposing his bulky form. "Speak softly, Cifuentes; and remember that

you have proved the weight of my hand, which has been thrice on your throat ere now, I believe."

The robber shrunk back, and, grasping his stiletto, gave one of those formidable scowls of rage and malice which so well became his villanous front, his beetling brows and matted hair.

"Vincentio, the cripple, lies shot in the ditch yonder," said Juan de la Roca. "He fell by the hand of the Briton: his crooked joints will no longer afford us a laugh in our den among the cliffs. We have lost our prime fool, senores, and I say blood for blood."

"*Viva!*" shouted the banditti; "blood for blood! 'Tis guerilla law: his life for Vincentio's."

"To the dogs with the cripple!" exclaimed Gaspar. "I tell you, comrades, that while I can strike a blow in his defence, he shall not die! By the beard of Satanas, the first man that whispers aught of this again, shall feel my knife between his ribs. Look you, *senores camarados;* we have all more to gain by his life than his death. Narvaez tells us that the cavalier is a very great friend of Alvaro of Villa Franca, whom the new government have raised to the rank of count, and to whom they have granted doubloons enough to pave the highway from Zagala to Merida. Don Alvaro will ransom his friend, and a fair sum will thus fall into our pockets. If not, the laws we have formed shall take their course, and the stranger must die."

But Cifuentes was still clamorous for his blood, and insisted on slaying him with his *own hand.* The rising storm increased when Ronald staggered up and stood among them. Many of the banditti began to prime and handle their fire-arms; and Stuart felt considerable anxiety for the end of the matter. He endeavoured to second the efforts of Alosegui by a long and bitter address, in which he upbraided them for their ingratitude in thus maltreating one who had served Spain so well, and had so often faced her enemies. He tore open his jacket and displayed his scars, but he appealed to them in vain. His voice was drowned in peals of savage laughter, with groans and yells, which roused his rage to an almost ungovernable pitch. His cheek burned with indignation as if a flame was scorching it, and his blood came and went through his pulses like lightning. How he longed to behold the effect of a sweeping volley of grape among these brutal desperadoes, could such have been discharged upon them at that moment! He watched eagerly the war of words carried on between Narvaez, Gaspar, and their adherents, and he earnestly hoped that blows would soon follow; to the end that, by arming himself, he might slay some more, perhaps cut his way through them and escape, or perishing, sell his life dearly as ever a brave man did who died sword in hand. Eyes began to kindle, and poniards were drawn,—oaths and invectives were used unsparingly on both sides, and a sharp conflict would probably have decided the matter, had not Juan de la Roca proposed to end the contest quietly by two throws of dice,—producing, while he spoke, a box and dice from his pocket. This motion was at once acceded to. Indeed these wretches seemed to have no mind of their own, but to be swayed by the opinions of others, as the wind agitates the boughs of a tree.

Brows were smoothed, and weapons sheathed; the oath and threat gave place to the equally brutal jest, and the gang crowded about their tall leader and his amiable lieutenant.

The fate of Ronald Stuart was to be in the power of him who should throw the highest number; and all swore on their crucifixes, or on the cross-guard of their poniards, to abide by the decision so obtained. Ronald, with sensations almost amounting to frenzy, beheld Gaspar and

his opponent retire to a flat stone, and rattle the fatal dice-box which was to determine whether or not he should be a living man in ten minutes. What a moment was this! Rage and hate, mingled with sorrow and bitterness, dread and regret,—the regret that a brave man feels who finds himself at the mercy of those whom he despises. Almost trembling with the feelings of malice and fury which agitated him, Cifuentes unsheathed his poniard, and after carefully examining the point and edge, laid it on the stone, to be ready for instant use if he won.

The moon was now shining in all her silver splendour down the narrow dell, and the stars, gleaming in the studded firmament, like diamonds and rubies, sparkled as they do in the skies of Spain alone when the atmosphere is pure and calm. Stuart beheld the blade of Narvaez glancing in the moonlight, and never had he looked with such dread on a weapon as he did upon that deadly stiletto; yet he had never shrunk from a line of charged bayonets,—which, as the reader knows, he had faced fearlessly more than once; but it is another affair to be slaughtered like a lamb or a child. The green swelling mountains and the dark defile were silent; no aid was near, and in every eye he read the glance of a foe. Narvaez rattled the box aloft, and cast down the dice on the stone, and his adherents bent over him earnestly.

"Four and five—nine!" cried the ruffian. "Nine *onzas* out of my first plunder will be laid on the shrine of our Lady of the Rock if I win. Throw, Gaspar,—and may the devil so direct, that you throw less!" He took up his poniard with a very decided air, while Gaspar in turn quietly rattled the box.

"Five and five—*ten!*" said he with cool triumph, looking around him; "*one* has saved him."

"Stay! let us look at them," cried Cifuentes, in a voice almost amounting to a shriek. "Ten, indeed! *Par Diez!* he has escaped me just now. But a time may yet come—"

"Silence!" roared Gaspar. "Senor," said he, advancing towards Ronald, who now began to breathe more freely, "I have saved your life,—for this time at least. You are now to consider yourself as our prisoner. We seldom keep any unless they are likely to pay well; for the rest, we generally find a stab six inches below the shoulder, the best method for getting rid of them. But remember, senor, that we are not people to be trifled with; therefore, attempt not to escape unransomed, for death would be the penalty; you have heard our oaths. If you have any interest here in Spain, your captivity will not be of long duration; and if you choose to take a turn of service with us among the mountains, we may be inclined to treat you as if you had the honour to be our comrade. We shall part friends, I trust. Many an alcalde and padre we have had, whose ransom has made us merry for months. I tell you the truth, senor; we are men of courage and honour, in spite of slander and unpleasant appearances. We are true cavaliers of fortune, and are wont to be somewhat delicate on points of honour; therefore you must neither use threat nor taunt while among us, as our daggers lie somewhat loosely in their scabbards. And I must add, *senor oficial*, that if the Condé de Villa Franca refuses to ransom you for the sum we name, the laws of our society,—laws we have formed and solemnly sworn to,—must take their course."

"Well, Senor Gaspar," said Stuart, who had listened coolly to all this preamble with folded arms, "and your law; what is it on that particular head?"

"Death!"

"And the ransom?"

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"Why, senor, we must arrange that. A cavalier is well worth a price, or four alcaldes; but, as you are a soldier, and soldiers are seldom over-burdened by the weight of their purses, we will not be severe."

"But Don Alvaro is rich," said Juan de la Roca. "Remember, my friends, that he married a rich dame of Truxillo, whose estates, when joined to his own, will be ample enough for a princedom,—ay, for a kingdom larger than ever was Algarve."

"And bethink ye of the rich ores," said Narvaez; "ores dug for him from the bowels of the mountains at Alcocer, at Guadalcanal, and Cazella in Estremadura, dug for him by the hands of wretched slaves condemned to his service for petty or pretended crimes by the accursed *regidores*, the *escrivanos del numero*, the alcaldes, the syndics, the military commanders, and the devil knows who more!"

"Cazella?" observed Gaspar; "right! there is silver and gold dug there."

"Yes, and have been so ever since the days of the infidel Moors," said Juan. "And Alvaro has mines of silver and copper at Logrosen, and in the Sierra de Guadaloupe. *Diavolo!* senores, a heavy fine! The cavalier of Estremadura is rich, and will redeem his friend from death. He has but to dig when he wants gold."

"*Carajo!*" said a robber; "I well know that. I was condemned to dig in the mine of Logrosen for robbing a priest of his mule; and I slaved away in those horrible pits until my bones well nigh parted company, and my back was flayed by the thongs of the cursed overseer. But one day I dashed out his brains with a shovel, and fled to the guerillas of Salvador de Zagala. A heavy ransom from Alvaro!"

"Two hundred golden *onzas!*" cried Juan de la Roca; "and if Villa Franca refuses, give his friend the Briton to feast the wolf and the raven!"

"*Viva!* Juan has spoken like a prince!" cried the banditti, while they made hill and valley ring with their boisterous applause.

Two, with their muskets loaded, had particular orders to escort Stuart, and to shoot him dead if he attempted to escape; after which the whole band got in motion and advanced up the mountains, seeking the most steep and dangerous paths, which often wound along the edge of beetling and precipitous cliffs, where Stuart, although a Scotsman and a mountaineer, had considerable trouble in threading his way.

Their journey ended when they reached a little square tower, which in size and form was not unlike the old fortalice of a lesser Scottish baron. It was perched on the summit of a steep rock, amid a wild and savage solitude, which appeared more dreary, at the time that Ronald viewed it, by the light of the waning moon.

This mountain fortress had been for centuries a ruin; and the little village, which had once been clustered near it (according to the usual fashion in Spain), had ages ago disappeared. But the outlaws, whom the feeble and crippled power of the Spanish authorities could not suppress, had thoroughly repaired it, and made it their principal stronghold; and from it, as their head-quarters, their lines and posts of communication were maintained through all the Basque provinces. Tradition said that it was erected by a petty prince of Navarre, and that the origin of its name was the murder of a priest within its walls. It was called the *Torre de los Frayles* (or Friars' tower); and the Guipuzcoan muleteer was careful to time his journey so that this ill-omened spot should be a few leagues in his rear before night fell.

On entering, a temporary drawbridge, crossing a deep fosse or chasm in the rocks, and forming the sole communication with the cliff, on a projec-

tion of which the tower was perched, was withdrawn, and Stuart, for the first time, felt his heart sink, as he entered the walls of the dreary abode of crime, and heard the strong door shut and barricaded behind him.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOME.

During the spring of 1814, while Ronald Stuart was serving with Lord Wellington's army in the South of France, the pecuniary affairs of his father came to a complete crisis. The net woven around him by legal chicanery, by his own unwariness in plunging headlong into lawsuits, and by prodigality of his money otherwise, he was ruined. "A true Highlander cannot refuse his sword or his purse to a friend," and the laird of Lochisla had been involved to the amount of several thousands in an affair of "caution," every farthing of which he had to pay. At the same time bills and bonds became due, and on his making an application for cash to Messrs. Caption and Horning, W.S., Macquirk's successors, they acquainted him, in a very short letter, composed in that peculiar style for which these gentlemen are so famous, "that Lochisla was already dipped—that is, mortgaged—to the utmost bearing, and that not a bodle more could be raised." The unfortunate laird found that every diabolical engine of "the profession" was in requisition against him, and that the estate which had descended to him through a long and martial line of Celtic ancestors, was passing away from him for ever. In the midst of his affliction he received tidings of the deeds of his brave son Ronald, who was mentioned with all honour by Sir Rowland Hill in the despatch which contained the account of the successful passage of the Nive, and of the storming of the château.

"Heaven bless my brave boy!" said the laird; "I shall see him no more. It would rejoice me to behold his fair face and buirdly figure once again, before my eyes are closed for ever: but it may not be; he will never behold my tomb! It will be far distant from the dark pines that shade the resting-place of my forefathers in the islet of the Loch."

And the old laird spoke truly. Ere long he saw the hall of his fathers in possession of the minions of the law: the broad lands of Lochisla became the prey of the stranger; and, with the trusty auld Donald Iverach and a faithful band of followers, the feeble remnant of his people, who yet, with true Highland devotion, insisted on following their chieftain to the far-off shores of Canada, he bade adieu for ever to his father-land.

Ere yet he had departed, however, there came one who had heard of his misfortunes and of his contemplated exile, to offer him his hand in peace and affection. It was the Lord of Inchavon.

"I will be a friend to your noble boy," he said. The Stuart answered only, "Heaven bless you, Lisle! but the lad has his sword, and a fearless heart."

They parted; and the clan Stuart of Lochisla, with its venerable leader, was soon on its way across the western wave.

At the time these events were occurring at home, Ronald was in the neighbourhood of Orthes with his regiment, which, in the battle that took place there, came in for its usual share of the slaughter and honour.

The long-awaited and eagerly wished-for peace arrived at last. Regiments were disbanded, and ships paid off; and in every part of Europe soldiers and sailors were returning to their homes in thousands, to take up

the plough and spade, which they had abandoned for the musket and cutlass. The Peninsula part of our army were all embarked at Toulouse, and the inmates of Inchavon watched anxiously the daily post and daily papers for some notice of the arrival of the transports containing Fassifern and his Highlanders, whose destination was the Cove of Cork.

One evening, a bright and sunny one in June, when Lord Lisle had pushed from him the sparkling decanters across the elaborately-polished table, and sunk back in his well-cushioned easy chair to enjoy a comfortable nap, and when Alice had tossed aside successively all the newspapers (she read only the marriages, fashionable news, and the Gazette), and taken up the last novel, which in her restlessness she resigned for *Marmion*, her favourite work, she was suddenly aroused from its glowing numbers by the noise of wheels, and the tramp of carriage-horses treading shortly and rapidly in the birchen lane, between the walls and trees of which the sound rung deep and hollow. The book fell from her hands; she started and listened, while her bosom rose, and a blush gathered on her soft girlish cheek. The sound increased: now the travellers had quitted the lane, and their carriage was rattling up the avenue, where the noise of the horses' feet came ringing across the wide and open lawn.

Alice shook the dark curls from her animated face, which became flushed with expectation. She moved to the window, and beheld a travelling-chariot, drawn by a pair of stout bays, with the great-coated driver on the saddle. The whole equipage appeared only at intervals between the trees and clumps of the lawn, as the driver made the horses traverse the long and intricate windings of the avenue, which had as many turnings as the Forth, before the house was reached.

"O papa! papa!" she exclaimed, clapping her white dimpled hands together, and leaping to his side to kiss him and shake sturdily the huge knobby arms of his old easy chair, and again skipping back to the windows with all the wild buoyancy of her age, "dear papa, do waken! Here comes Louis!"

"Eh! what! eh! Louis, did you say?" cried the old lord, bolting up like a harlequin. "Is the girl mad, that she frisks about so?"

"O dear papa! 'tis my brother Louis!" and she began to weep with joy and excitement.

"It must be he," replied her father, looking from a window; "it must be Louis! I don't think we expect any visitors. But to come thus! I always thought he would ride up from Perth on horseback. On my honour 'tis a smart turn-out that! A double imperial on the roof, and—how! there is a female, a lady's maid behind, and the rogue of a footman with his arm around her waist, according to the usual wont and practice. A lady inside, too! See, she is bowing to us. Well; I would rather have seen Louis, but I wonder who these can be!" He rang a bell violently.

"'Tis our own Louis, indeed! O my dear brother!" exclaimed Alice, trembling with delight. "Hold me up, papa; I am almost fainting. Ah!" added she inwardly, "when Louis is so near. Ronald Stuart cannot be far off.

"Louis, indeed!" replied her father pettishly, for he thought she had disappointed him. "Tut, girl! do you not see the lady in the vehicle?"

"O papa! that is a great secret,—the affair of the lady; we meant to surprise you;" and without saying more, she bounded away from his side.

The chaise was brought up at a gallop to the steps of the portico, and the smart postilion wheeled it skilfully round, backing and spurring with an air of speed and importance, scattering the gravel in showers right and left, and causing the chaise to rock from side to side like a ship in a storm. This was for effect. A postilion always brings his cattle up at a sharp

pace; but the chaise was well hung on its springs, and the moment the panting horses halted, it became motionless and steady. At that instant Alice, with her masses of curls streaming behind her, rushed down the splendid staircase, through the lofty saloon, and reached the portico just as the footman sprang from the dickey and threw down the iron steps with a bang as he opened the door. An officer, muffled in a large blue cloak lined with red, leaped out upon the gravel walk; Alice threw her arms around her brother, and hung sobbing on his breast.

"Alie, my merry little Alie, has become a tall and beautiful woman!" exclaimed Louis, holding her from him for a moment while he gazed upon her face, and then pressed her again to his breast. "Upon my honour you have grown quite a tall lady," he added, laughing. "Our father—"

"Is well, Louis, well; and waiting for you."

"Good! This is my—this is our Virginia," said Louis, handing out his Spanish wife. "This is the dear girl I have always mentioned in my letters for two years past, Alice; her friends have all perished in the Peninsular war, and I have brought her far from her native land, to a foreign country. You must be a kind sister to her, Alie, as you have ever been to me."

"I will always love her, Louis; I will, indeed," murmured the agitated girl, who, never having beheld a Spaniard before, expected something very different from the beautiful creature around whose neck she fondly twined an arm. "I am your sister: kiss me, Virginia dear!" said she, and two most young lady-like salutes were exchanged. The fair face of Alice Lisle blushed with pleasure. The darker cheek of the Castilian glowed likewise, and her bright hazel eyes flashed and sparkled with all the fire and vivacity of her *nacion*.

"Louis," whispered Alice, blushing crimson as she spoke, and as they ascended the sixteen steps of variegated Portsoy marble which led to the house; "Louis, is not Ronald Stuart with you?"

"Alas! no, Alice," replied Lisle, changing colour.

"Poor dear Ronald!" said his sister sorrowfully, "could he not procure leave too? Papa must apply to the colonel—to your proud Fassifern, for it."

"Virginia will inform you of what has happened," said Louis, with so sad a tone that all the pleasant visions which were dancing in the mind of the joyous girl were instantly destroyed, and she grew deadly pale; "Virginia will tell you all about it, Alie. Ladies manage these matters of explanation better than gentlemen."

"Matters!" reiterated the affrighted Alice involuntarily; "matters! Heaven guide me! I thought all the terrors of these four years were passed for ever. But what has misfortune in store for me now?"

Her father, whose feet and limbs were somewhat less nimble and flexible than hers, and had thus been longer in descending the stair and traversing the long lobbies, now approached, and embraced his son with open arms; while, *en masse*, the servants of the mansion crowded round, offering their good wishes and congratulatory welcome to *the Master*, as Louis was styled by them, being the son of a Scottish baron. He was now the Master of Lisle, or Lysle, as it is spelt in the Peerage. The stately figure of the fair Castilian, who, embarrassed and confused, clung to the arm of the scarcely less agitated Alice, puzzled the old lord a good deal. She yet wore her graceful mantilla and tightly-fitting Spanish frock of black satin. The latter was open at the bosom, to show her embroidered vest and collar, but was laced zigzag across with a silver cord. The thick clusters of her hair were gathered in a *redecilla*, or net-work bag, behind, all save the glossy brown curls escaping from beneath a smart English bonnet, which,

although it fully displayed her noble and beautiful features, contrasted or consorted strangely with the rest of her attire.

The old lord appeared astonished and displeased for a moment. He bowed, smiled, and then stared, and bowed and smiled again, while Virginia coloured crimson, and her large Spanish eyes began to sparkle in a very alarming manner; but beginning to suspect who the fair stranger was, the frank old lord took both her hands in his, kissed her on each cheek, begged pardon, and then asked whom he had the honour of addressing.

"How!" exclaimed Louis, in astonishment; "is it possible that you do not know?"

"Not I, upon my honour!" replied his father, equally amazed; "how should I?"

"Were my letters from Orthes and Toulouse, relative to my marriage, never received?"

"Marriage!" exclaimed his father, almost pausing as they crossed the saloon. "By Jove! Master Louis, you might have condescended to consult me in such a matter!"

"My dear father," replied Louis, laughing, for he saw that his parent was more astonished than displeased, "you cannot be aware of the circumstances under—But you know the proverb, all is fair in war: and my letters—"

"Were all received,—at least Alice received them all."

"Ah! you cunning little fairy," said Louis, turning towards his pale sister; "you have played us all this trick to surprise your good papa, when he heard of his new daughter."

"A wonderful girl! to be the repository of so important a secret so long," said her father, evidently in high glee. "But she always loved to produce a commotion, and to study effect. I will hear all your stories by-and-by, and sentence you each according to your demerits; but we must not stand here, with all the household gaping at us. Lead your naughty sun-burnt brother up-stairs, Alice—he seems to have forgotten the way—and I will escort your new sister."

He gave his arm to Virginia, and conducted her up the broad staircase which led to the upper part of the mansion, where the splendour and elegance of the furniture, the size of the windows, the hangings, the height of the ceilings, the rich cornices, the carving, the gilding, the paintings, statues, lustres, the loftiness, lightness, and beauty of everything architectural and decorative, struck the stranger forcibly when she remembered the sombre gloom and clumsiness, both of fabric and fashion, to which she had been accustomed in the dwellings of her native country. Indeed, the mansion of the richest Spanish grandee was not so snug by one-half as the coachman's apartment above the stables at Inchavon-house.

Alice was in an agony of expectation to hear what Louis had to say about Ronald Stuart; but she was doomed to be kept cruelly on the mental rack for some time, while all her brother's humble but old and respected friends among the household appeared in succession, to tender their regards and bid him welcome, expressing their pleasure to "see him safe home again among decent, discreet, and responsible folk," as the jolly old butler, who acted as spokesman, said. There was the bluff gamekeeper, in his tartan jacket, broad bonnet, and leather spats, or leggings, long Louis's rival shot, and master of the sports; there was the pinched and demure old housekeeper, with her rusty silk gown, keys, and scissors, and huge pouch, which was seldom untenanted by a small Bible and big brandy-flask; the fat, flushed, and greasy cook, whose ample circumference proclaimed her the priestess and picture of good living; the smart and rosy housemaids, all ribands and smiles—Jessie Cavers in particular; and

there was Jock, and Tom, and Patie, laced and liveried chevaliers of the cockade and shoulder-knot, who were all introduced at the levee in their turn, while confusion, bustle, and uproar reigned supreme through the whole of the usually quiet and well-ordered mansion of Inchavon.

Every one was glad and joyful to behold again the handsome young Master of Lisle: but then his lady! she was termed "*an unco body*," and about her there were two conflicting opinions. The men praised her beauty, "her glossy hair, and her hawk's een,"—the women her sweetness and affability; but almost all had observed the crucifix that hung at her neck, and whispered fearful surmises of her being a Papist.

"My dear sir," said Louis, after they had become tolerably composed in a sort of snug library, termed by the servants "my lord's chaumer,"—"can it be possible, or true, that Alice has never informed you of my marriage with Donna Virginia de Alba?"

"I concealed it to surprise dear papa," replied Alice, making a sickly attempt to smile.

"You always loved effect, Alie," said her father; "but really I could have dispensed with so sudden a surprise on this occasion. How fortunate I am in having such a beauty for a daughter!" He passed his hand gently over the thick brown curls of the Spaniard. "Look up at me, Virginia; a pretty name, too! On my honour, my girl, you have beautiful eyes! I ever thought Alie's were splendid, but she will find hers eclipsed. Your father—"

"Was the Duke of Alba de T——," interrupted Louis, who was now anxious to produce an effect of a different kind in his bride's favour. "He was a Buonapartist—"

"Ah! his name is familiar to me. He—"

"Was unfortunately slain when the fort, or château, where I was confined, was so bravely stormed by Ronald Stuart's light company."

"I heard of all that when the news arrived in London. Our Virginia comes of a proud, but a—a— an unfortunate race." He could not find a more gentle word.

"Spain boasts not of a nobler name than that of Alba; but, save a sister in a convent in Galicia, my dear Virginia is its only representative. All the cavaliers of her house have fallen in battle; and lastly the duke, by the hands of Evan Iverach and Macrone, a serjeant, who attacked him with his pike. Poor Stuart, though in peril himself, did all he could to save him; but the hot blood of the Gael was up, and the fierce Spaniard perished. But Virginia is weeping; we are only recalling her sorrows, and must say no more of these matters just now. Ronald Stuart—"

"Ah! by the bye, what of him? A brave fellow! See how Alice blushes. Faith! I shall never forget the day the dauntless young Highlandman pulled me out of Corrie-avon. Has the good lad returned with you to Perthshire?"

"No," answered Louis with hesitation, glancing uneasily at Alice while he spoke. "He has not returned yet."

"'Tis well," continued his father. "Poor Stuart! he will have no home—no kind friends to return to, as you have, Louis, after all his toil and bloodshed. Not a hand is there now in the green glen of the Isla to grasp his in welcome!"

"I read in the Perthshire papers that the estate had been sold, and that his father, with all the Stuarts of the glen, had emigrated to Canada. Dreadful intelligence it will be for him when he hears it! He will be wounded most deeply in those points where the true Highlander is assuredly most vulnerable. He will be almost driven mad; and I would scarcely trust other lips than yours, Alice, to reveal the sad tidings to him. I read

them at Toulouse. Stuart was not with us then. He has been—he has been—six weeks missing from the regiment."

"Six weeks missing!" cried Lord Lisle, while a cry of horror died away on the pallid lips of Alice, who drooped her head on the shoulder of Virginia.

"Keep a brave heart, Alie dear!" said Louis, clasping her waist affectionately. "I have no fears for your knight of Santiago, as the mess call him. He will swim where another man would sink. Had you seen him, as I often have, skirmishing in advance, charging at the head of his company, or leading the forlorn hope at Almarez on the Tagus, or the château on the Nive, you would suppose he had a charmed life, and was invulnerable to steel and lead, as men supposed Dundee to be until the field of Killiecrankie. Perhaps he has joined by this time. I procured six months' leave, and left the Highlanders the instant the anchor was dropped at Cove. My next letters from the regiment may have some intelligence. Campbell, I know, will write to me instantly, if he hears aught."

"But how comes it to pass that Stuart is missing? what has happened?" asked his father, while Alice listened in breathless agony to the reply.

"We were quartered at Muret, a town on the Garonne, eight or nine miles distant from Toulouse. We had lain there ever since the decisive battle gained over Soult; and in the church-yard of Muret Stuart buried his servant, a brave lad from Lochisla, who had received a death-shot on that memorable Easter Sunday. Ronald mourned his loss deeply; for the lad had become a soldier for his sake, and they were old schoolfellows—old companions and playmates. He was a gallant and devoted fellow. You remember him, Alice? Many a love-letter he has carried to and fro, between this and Lochisla; and often, bonnet in hand, he has led your pony among the steepest cliffs of Craigonan, by ways and crooks where I should tremble to venture now."

"And he is dead?" said Alice, giving vent to her feelings by a plentiful shower of tears.

"He was shot by a Frenchman's bullet, Alie."

"Poor dear Evan!" replied his sister, wringing her white hands; "I shall never forget him. He was ever so respectful and so obliging."

"Jessie Cavers has lost her handsome sweetheart. He was buried close by the old church of Muret, and Ronald's hand laid his head in the grave. He received a deeper—a better—yet not less hallowed tomb than the many thousands who were covered up in ditches, in the fields, and by the way-sides, just wherever they were found lying dead. At Muret, one night, a despatch arrived from Lord Wellington by an orderly dragoon. It was to be forwarded to the Condé de Penne Villamur, at Elizondo, a town on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees; and, as its bearer, Stuart departed about midnight, on horseback. Sufficient time for his return elapsed before our embarkation at Toulouse. The eventful day came; but no Stuart appeared, and we embarked without him. Some unlooked-for circumstance must have caused delay,—perhaps his horse becoming lame, or his cash running short; but we shall probably hear of him from Toulouse, or Passages, in a fortnight at the furthest. I have no fears for Ronald Stuart. He will cut his way, scatheless, through perils which a score of men would sink under."

"I trust in Heaven that it may be so," said Lord Lisle fervently. "Truly, I wish the lad well; he is the last stem of an old tree, that has fallen to the earth at last."

"Although Louis spoke cheerfully to comfort his agitated sister, he nevertheless felt considerable anxiety regarding the fate of his friend. He knew too well the disorderly state of the country through the wild frontiers

of which he had to pass; and his imagination pictured a hundred perils, against which Ronald's courage and tact would be unavailing. He besought Virginia to comfort Alice, by putting the best possible face upon matters; but her unwary relative made circumstances worse, by letting truths slip out which had been better concealed, and which, although they seemed quite common-place matters to a Castilian, presented a frightful picture of Spain to a young Scottish lady.

The unhappy Alice became a prey to a thousand anxious fears and apprehensions, which prepared her mind to expect the worst. A month passed away—a weary month of misery, of sad and thrilling expectation, and no tidings were heard of Stuart. By Louis's letters from the regiment, it seemed that his brother-officers had given him up for lost. The newspapers were searched with sickening anxiety, but nothing transpired; and the family at Inchavon beheld, with deep uneasiness, the cheek of Alice growing pale day after day, and her bright eyes losing their wonted lustre. About six weeks after Louis's arrival, Lord Lisle communicated with the military authorities in London regarding the young soldier, in whose fate his family were so greatly interested. All were in a state of great expectation, when the long, formidable letter, covered with franks, initials, and stamps, arrived. To support herself Alice clung to Virginia, and hid her face in her bosom, for she trembled excessively while her father read the cold and official reply to his anxious letter.

"Horse Guards, * * * 1814.

"My Lord,

"In reply to your lordship's letter of the 25th instant, I have the honour to acquaint you, by the direction of his Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief, that nothing has transpired, further than what the public journals contain, respecting the fate of Captain Ronald Stuart, of the Gordon Highlanders. But, if that unfortunate officer does not rejoin his regiment at Cork before the next muster-day, he must be superseded.

"I have the honour to be, my lord, &c. &c.

"Henry Torrens, Mil. Sec.

"Right Hon. Lord Lisle, of Inchavon."

Alice wrung her hands, and wept in all the abandonment of woe. The last reed she had leant on had snapped—her last hope was gone, and she knew that she should never behold Ronald more. The next muster-day (then the 24th of every month) arrived; and, as being still "absent without leave," he was superseded, and his name appeared no longer on the list of the regiment. It was sad intelligence for his friends in Perthshire; but it was upon one gentle-loving and timid heart, that this sudden stroke fell most heavily. Poor Alice! she grew very sad, and long refused to be comforted. As a drowning man clings to straws, so clung alice to every hope and chance of Ronald's return, until the letter of Sir Henry Torrens drove her from her last stronghold.

Days rolled on and became weeks, and weeks rolled on to months, and in her own heart the poor girl was compelled to acknowledge or believe, what her friends had long concluded, that Ronald Stuart was numbered with the dead. It was a sad blow to one whose joyous heart had been but a short time before full almost to overflowing with giddy and romantic visions of love and happiness. Under this severe mental shock she neither sickened nor died, and yet she felt as deeply and poignantly as mortal woman could suffer.

Few or none, perhaps, die of love or of sorrow, whatever poets and interested romancers may say to the contrary. But as this is not the work of the one or the other, but a true memoir or narrative, the facts must

be told, however contrary to rule, or to the expectation of my dear readers.

In course of time the sorrow of Alice Lisle became more subdued, the bloom returned to her faded cheek, and she used to laugh and smile,—but *not* as of old. She was never now heard to sing, and the sound of her harp or piano no more awoke the echoes of the house. She was content, but far from being happy. When riding or rambling about with Virginia or Louis, she could never look down from the mountains on the lonely tower and desert glen of Isla without symptoms of the deepest emotion, and she avoided every path that led towards the patrimony of the Stuarts.

But a good example of philosophy and resignation under woe was set before her by her servant, Jessie Cavers. That young damsel, finding that she had lost Evan Iverach beyond the hope of recovery, instead of spoiling her bright eyes in weeping for his death, employed them successfully in looking for a successor to his vacant place. She accordingly accepted the offers of Jock Nevermiss, the gamekeeper, whose coarse shooting-jacket and leather spats had been for a time completely eclipsed by the idea of Iverach's scarlet coat and gartered hose.

The old Earl of Hyndford came down again in the shooting season, and renewed his attentions to Alice; but with no better success than before,—much to his amazement. He deemed that her heart, being softened by grief, would the more readily receive a new impression. He quitted Inchavon-house, and, in a fit of spleen and disappointment, set off on a continental ramble, acting the disconsolate lover with all his might.

Louis, leaving Virginia at Inchavon with his sister, rejoined the Highlanders at Fermoy, and in a week thereafter had the pleasure to obtain a "company."

The Highlanders were daily expecting the route for their native country, but were again doomed to be disappointed. They were ordered to Flanders,—to the "Lowlands of Holland," where Scottish valour has been so often triumphant in the times of old, for the flames of war had broken forth again with renewed fury.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TORRE DE LOS FRAYLES.

When Ronald found himself helplessly, and, as he thought, irrecoverably immured in the *Torre de los Frayles*, and surrounded by a band of the most merciless and desperate ruffians conceivable,—defenceless, in their power, and secluded among the wildest fastnesses of the Spanish Pyrenees, his heart sickened at the hopelessness of his prospects. His life depended entirely on the will and pleasure of his captors, and he felt all that acute agony of spirit of which a brave man is susceptible when reflecting that he might perish like a child in their hands, helpless and unrevenged. He was conducted to a desolate apartment, to which light was admitted by a couple of loop-holes, which, being destitute of glass, gave free admittance to the cold air of the mountains.

Excepting an antique table and chair, the room was destitute of furniture, and Ronald was compelled to repose on the stone-flagged floor, with no other couch than a large ragged mantle, which a renegade priest, one of thousands whom the war had unfrocked, lent him, offering, at the same time, indulgently to hear his confession. Ronald glanced at the long dagger and brass-barrelled pistols which garnished the belt of the *ci-devant* padre, and, smiling sourly, begged to be excused, saying that he had

nothing to confess, saving his disgust for his captors, and the sense he felt of Spanish ingratitude.

"*Morte de Dios!*" swore the incensed priest as he departed, "you are an incorrigible heretic. Feeding you, is feeding what ought to be burned; and I would roast you like a kid, but for that meddling ape, Gaspar!"

By order of the last-named worthy, who appeared to be the acknowledged leader, a sentinel was placed at the door of the apartment, which was well secured on the outside to prevent Ronald's escape. At the same time Alosegui, who said he wished to be friendly to a *brother capitan*, gave him a screw of a peculiar construction, with which he could strongly secure his door on the inside—a necessary precaution when so formidable an enemy as Narvaez Cifuentes was within a few feet of him. Having secured the entrance as directed, he rolled himself up in the cloak of the pious father,—but not to sleep, for dawn of day found him yet awake, cursing his untoward fortune, and revolving, forming, and rejecting a thousand desperate plans to escape. Even when, at last, he did drop into an uneasy sleep or dreamy doze, he was quickly aroused by the twangling of guitars and uproar of a drunken chorus in the next apartment, where the padre was trolling forth a ditty, which, a few years before, would have procured him a lodging for life in the dungeons of the terrible Inquisition.

To Stuart, his present situation appeared now almost insupportable. He sprang to the narrow loop-holes, and made a long and acute reconnoissance of the country round about, especially in the neighbourhood of the robbers' den, and he became aware that escape, without the concurrence of Alosegui or some of his followers, was utterly impracticable. The tower was perched, like an eagle's nest, on the very verge of a perpendicular cliff, some hundred yards in height, and a chasm, dark and apparently bottomless, separated the tower from the other parts of the mountain, or, I may say, the *land*, as it hung almost in the air. At every pass of the hills leading to the narrow vale where it was situated, a well-armed and keen-eyed scout kept watchful guard, for the double purpose of giving alarm in case of danger, or warning when any booty appeared in sight. The bottom of the valley which the tower overlooked was covered with rich copse-wood, among which wound, like a narrow stripe of crystal, a mountain stream, a tributary of the Bidassoa,—the way to the West.

About noon he was visited by Gaspar Alosegui, with whom he was ceremoniously invited to take breakfast; and yielding to the cravings of appetite, he unhesitatingly accepted the proposal, and sat down at the same table with four fellows, who, Gaspar told him, were the greatest cutthroats and most expert bravoes in Spain. The apartment in which they eat was a dilapidated hall, which bore no distant resemblance to the one at Lochisla, save that its roof was covered with carved stone pendants and grim Gothic faces, among which hung branches of grapes or raisins, nets of Portugal onions, bags of Indian corn, and other provender; and the floor was strewed with mule-pannels, saddles, arms of all sorts, towards which Ronald glanced furtively from time to time, and countless bales, barrels, wine-skins, &c., like a merchant's storehouse.

Ronald got through his repast without offending any of the dagger-grasping rogues; but he was so much disgusted with their language and brutality of manner, that in future he resolved to eat by himself, at all risks. Narvaez, with a strong party under his command, was absent, to watch for a train of mules in the neighbourhood of Roncesvalles, and Ronald was therefore relieved from his hateful presence. Gaspar assembled the remainder of the band in solemn conclave, to consult about the ransom of Stuart. When the latter, who stood near Alosegui's chair,

looked around him upon the ruffian assemblage, and beheld so many dark, ferocious, and black-bearded faces, he *felt* that, among such men, his life was not worth a *quarto*.

The amount of the ransom had been fixed on the preceding evening. When Alosegui inquired where the Condé de Villa Franca then resided, no one could say anything with certainty about it, but all supposed him to be at Madrid. In support of this supposition, the *soi-disant* padre produced, from the crown of his sugar-loaf hat, a ragged number of "*El Espanol*," at least three months old, well worn and frayed, and which he carried about him for gun-wadding. In one of the columns, the arrival of Don Alvaro and his countess appeared among the fashionable intelligence. To Madrid, therefore, it was resolved that Ronald should despatch a letter, the bearer of which should be Juan de la Roca, who, for cunning and knavery, was equal, if not infinitely superior, to Lazarillo de Tormes, of happy memory. His travelling expenses were also to be defrayed, fully and amply, before the captive would be released. To save time, for it was a long way to Madrid, Ronald proposed to communicate with the British consuls at Passages or Bayonne; but the proposition was at once negatived by a storm of curses and a yell of dissatisfaction from the banditti, while, waving his hand, Alosegui acquainted him sternly, that it was inconsistent with their safety or intentions to permit his corresponding with the consul at either of those places, as some strenuous and unpleasant means might be taken to release him unransomed. And before they would proceed farther in the business, the wily *bandidos* compelled him to pledge his solemn word of honour as a cavalier and soldier, that he would not attempt to escape,—a pledge which, it may be imagined, he gave with the utmost reluctance. While his bosom was swelling with rage and regret, Ronald seated himself at the table and wrote to Alvaro, praying that he would lend him the sum the thieves required, and setting forth that his life was forfeited in case of a refusal. Seldom has a letter been indicted under such circumstances. While he wrote, a Babel of tongues resounded in his ear,—all swearing and quarrelling about the delay, and proposing that cold steel or a swing over the rocks should cut the matter short, as it was very doubtful whether the Count de Villa Franca would ever send so large a sum of money. But Gaspar's voice of thunder silenced their murmurs.

"I will drink the heart's blood of any man who opposes or disobeys my orders," cried he, striking the rude table with his mighty fist. "I am a man of honour, and must keep my word, *par Diez!* Hark you, my comrades; again I tell you, that for three months the life of the prisoner is as sacred as if he were an abbot."

"Three months!" thought Ronald bitterly. "In *three months*, but for this cursed misfortune, I might have been the husband of Alice Lisle."

The letter to Don Alvaro was sealed by Ronald's own seal (which one of the band was so obliging as to lend him for the occasion), and placed in the hand of Juan de la Roca.

"*Adios, senor! adios, vaga!*" said the young thief with an impudent leer, and presenting his hand to Ronald at his departure. "Remember, senor, that for your sake, I lose the chance of winning one of the sweetest prizes in Spain."

"How, Senor Juan?" replied Stuart, bestowing on him a keen glance of contempt.

"A girl, to be sure, a fair girl we captured near Maya," said Juan sulkily; "and I am half tempted to cast your despatch to the winds."

"Come, Juan, we must part friends at least," said Ronald, willing to dissemble, when he remembered how much his fate lay in the power of this

young rascal. He gave him his hand, and they parted with a show of urbanity, which was probably affected on both sides.

In a few minutes he beheld him quit the Friars' Tower, and depart on his journey mounted on a stout mule, and so much disguised that he scarcely knew him. His ragged apparel had been replaced by the smart attire of a student, and was all of becoming black velvet. A large portfolio was slung on his back, to disguise him more, and support the character which he resolved to bear as a travelling *artista*. He was a very handsome young fellow, and his features were set off by his broad sombrero and the black feathers which vanity had prompted him to don. A black silk mantle dangled for ornament from his shoulders, while one more coarse and ample was strapped to the bow of his mule's pannel. He had a pair of holsters before him, and wore a long poniard in his sash: altogether, he had very much the air of a smart student of Salamanca or Alcala. From a window Ronald anxiously watched the lessening form of this messenger of his fate, as he urged his mule down the steep windings of the pathway to the valley; and a thousand anxieties, and alternate hopes and doubts distracted him, as he thought of the dangers that beset the path of his ambassador, of the lengthened duration and possible result of his expedition.

In no country save Spain could the dreadful atrocities perpetrated by the wretches into whose hands Ronald had fallen, have been permitted in the nineteenth century. A day never passed without the occurrence of some new outrage, and many were acted under his own observation. On one occasion the band captured an aged syndic of Maya, who had made himself particularly obnoxious by executing some of the gang. His captors, to refine on cruelty, tore out his eyes and turned him away on the mountains in a tempestuous night, desiring him to return to his magistracy, and be more merciful to cavaliers of fortune in future.

An unfortunate *medico* of Huarte, who was journeying on a mule across the mountains from St. Juan de Luz, where he had been purchasing a store of medicines, fell into their clutches somewhere near the rock of Maya. He could procure no ransom: many who owed him long bills, and whom he rescued from the jaws of death by the exercise of his art, and to whom his messenger applied, would send him no answer, being very well pleased, probably, to be rid of a troublesome creditor. One of the band being seriously ill, the life of the *medico* was to be spared if he cured him. The bandit unluckily died, and the doom of his physician was sealed. It was abruptly announced to him that he must die, and by his own weapons, as Gaspar informed him. The unhappy son of Esculapius prayed hard that his life might be spared, and promised that he would dwell for the remainder of his days in the Torre de los Frayles,—to spare him, for he was a very old man, and had many things to repent of. But his tyrants were inexorable. After being confessed with mock religious solemnity by Gorgorza de la Puente, he was compelled to swallow every one of his own drugs, which he did with hideous grimaces and trembling limbs, amidst the uproarious laughter and cruel jests of his destroyers, who beheld him expire almost immediately after finishing the nauseous dose they had compounded, and then consigned his body to that charnel-house, the chasm before the doorway of their pandemonium.

Several months elapsed—months which to Ronald appeared like so many centuries, for he had awaited in almost hourly expectation the arrival of some intelligence from Madrid; but the dreary days lagged on, and his heart began to lose hope. Juan de la Roca appeared to have travelled slowly. Letters were received from him by Alosegui, at different times, by the hands of certain muleteers and *contrabandistas*, who, on passing the

mountains, always paid a regular sum as toll to the banditti, whom, for their own sakes, they were glad to conciliate so easily. These despatches informed the thieves of Juan's progress; but they often cursed the young rascal, and threatened vengeance for his tardiness and delay. But Juan, by exercising his ingenuity as a cut-purse, pickpocket, cloak-snatcher, and gambler, contrived to keep himself in a constant supply of cash; and he seemed determined to enjoy to the utmost the short term of liberty allowed him. At last he disappeared. His companions in crime heard of him no more; but whether he had been poniarded in some brawl, sent to the galleys, or made off with Stuart's ransom-money, remained a mystery. The last appeared to the banditti to be the most probable cause for his non-appearance, and their curses were loud and deep.

Stuart now found that his life was in greater jeopardy than before. Alosegui proposed to him to take the vows, and join the banditti as a volunteer in their next marauding expedition; and added, that if he would take pains to conciliate the good-will of the lieutenant, the Señor Narvaez, and distinguish himself, he might be promoted in the band. Alosegui made this proposal with his usual dry sarcastic manner; and although Ronald, who was in no humour to be trifled with, rejected the strange offer of service with as much scorn and contempt as he could muster, he saw, on second thoughts, that for his own safety a little duplicity was absolutely necessary. He affected to have doubts, and craved time to think of the matter, intending, if once well armed, free of the tower, and with his feet on the free mountain-side, to fight his way off, or to die sword in hand.

But he was saved from the dishonour of even pretending to be their comrade for a single hour, because, in a very short space of time, a most unlooked-for change of politics took place at Torre de los Frayles.

A train of muleteers about to depart from Elizondo for France or the lower part of the Pyrenees, sent forward one of their number to the robbers' den to pay the toll. The mule-driver was made right welcome. The banditti found it necessary to cultivate to the utmost the friendship of these travelling merchants, with whom they trafficked and bartered, exchanging goods and valuables for money, clothing, arms, and ammunition, supplies of which were regularly brought them, and accounts were balanced in the most exact and business-like manner.

The envoy from Elizondo had transacted his business, and been furnished with Alosegui's receipt and pass, formally signed and marked with a cross; but he seemed in no hurry to depart, and remaining, drank and played at chess and dominoes for some hours with the thieves, who were, scouts excepted, generally all within their garrison in the daytime.

Ronald knew that a messenger from a train of mules was in his place of confinement; but as visits of this kind in no way concerned him, he had ascended to the summit of the tower, and there paced to and fro, watching anxiously as usual the long dim vista of the valley, with the expectation of seeing Juan de la Roca, on his grey mule, wending his way towards the Tower of the Friars. He would have hailed with joy the return of this young rogue as a delivering angel; but such a length of time had now elapsed since his disappearance that, in Ronald's breast, hope began gradually to give way to despair; and when he remembered Alice, his home, and his forfeited commission, his brain almost reeled with madness. Shading his eyes from the hot glare of the noon-day sun, he was looking intently down the long misty vale which stretched away to the westward, when he was roused by some one touching him on the shoulder.

He turned about, and beheld the round and good-humoured face of Lazaro Gomez, fringed, as of old, with its matted whiskers and thick scrub beard.

"Lazaro Gomez, my trusty muleteer of Merida! how sorry I am to see you in this devil's den."

"Senor, indeed you have much reason to be very happy, if you knew all."

"How, Gomez?"

"Hush, senor! Speak softly! you will know all in good time. I came hither to pay the toll for my comrades, who at present keep themselves close in Elizondo for fear of our friends in this damnable tower; and there they must remain until I return. By our Lady of Majorga, but I am glad to see you, senor! As I say now to my brother Pedro, *Senor Caballero*, allow me to have the honour of shaking hands with you?"

Stuart grasped the huge horny hand of the honest muleteer and shook it heartily, feeling a sensation so closely akin to rapture and delight, that he could almost have shed tears. It was long since he had shaken the hand of an honest man, or looked on other visages than those of dogged, sullen, and scowling ruffians. At that moment Stuart felt happy; it was so agreeable to have kind intercourse, even with so humble a friend, after the five months he had passed in the dreary abode of brutality and crime.

"And why, Lazaro, do you address your brother, the serjeant, so formally?"

"Ah, senor! Pedro is a great man now! He is no longer a humble trooper, to pipe-clay his belts and hold his captain's bridle. By his sword he has carved out a fair name for himself, and a fair fortune likewise. He led three assaults against Pampeluna, like a very valiant fool as he is, and was three times shot through the body for his trouble. Don Carlos de Espana, a right noble cavalier, embraced him before the whole line of the Spanish army, and appointed him a cornet in Don Alvaro's troop of lancers. The next skirmish with the enemy made him a lieutenant, knight of Santiago, and of the most valiant order of "the Band." Don Alvaro has also procured him a patent of nobility, which he always carries in his sash, lest any one should unpleasantly remind his nobleness that he is the eldest son of old Sancho Gomez, the alguazil, who dwelt by the bridge of Merida."

"I rejoice at his good fortune."

"But I have not told you all, senor," continued the gossiping muleteer. "A rich young widow of Aranjuez, the Condessa de Estramera, fell in love with him, when one day he commanded a guard at the palace of Madrid. An old duenna was employed—letters were carried to and fro—meetings held in solitary places; and the upshot was, that the condessa bestowed her fair hand, with a fortune of—of—the holy Virgin knows how many thousand ducats, upon my most happy rogue of a brother, Lieutenant Don Pedro Gomez, of the lancers of Merida; and now they live like a prince and princess."

"Happy Pedro! The condessa is beautiful; I have seen her, Lazaro."

"Plump Ignesa, the chamber-maid at the *posada* of Majorga, is more to my mind. I never could relish your stately donnas, with their high combs and long trains. This condessa is niece of that prince of rogues, the Duke of Alba de T——, who was killed in the service of Buonaparte; but Pedro cares not for that."

"In the history of his good fortune, you see the advantage of being a soldier, Lazaro."

"With all due respect to your honourable uniform, which I am sorry to see so tattered, senor, I can perceive no advantage in being a soldier—none at all, *par Diez!* I envy Pedro not the value of a maravedi. He has served and toiled, starved and bled, in the war of independence, like any slave, rather than a soldier."

"So have I, Lazaro," said Stuart; "and these rags, and confinement here for five months, have been my reward."

The muleteer snapped his fingers, then gave a very knowing wink, and was about to whisper something; but, observing one of the banditti watching, he continued talking about his brother.

"Ay, like any poor slave, senor; and has more shot-holes in his skin than I have bell-buttons on my jacket. And now, when the war is over, he has still a troublesome game to play in striving to please his hot-headed commanding-officer and lady wife, whom it would be considered a mortal sin to baste with a buff strap, as I may do Ignesa when she becomes my helpmate and better half. Pedro's honours weigh heavily upon him, and he has many folks to please; whereas I have none to humour save myself, and perhaps that stubborn jade *Capitana*, my leading mule, or Ignesa of Majorga, who gets restive, too, sometimes, and refuses to obey either spur or bridle. But my long whip, and a smart rap from my *cajado*, soothe the mule,—and my sweet guitar and merry madrigal, the maiden. I am a thousand times happier than Pedro! I never could endure either domestic or military control; and would rather be Lazaro Gomez, with his whip and his mules, than the stately king of the Spanish nation. I have the bright sun, the purple wine, my cigar, and the red-cheeked peasant-girls to kiss and dance with,—and what would mortal man have more? *Bueno!*"

He concluded by throwing himself into an attitude, and flourishing his sombrero round his head with a theatrical air. Ronald smiled: but he thought that, notwithstanding all this display, and Lazaro's frequent assertions that he was happier than Pedro, a little envy continued to lurk in a corner of his merry and honest heart.

"But has Pedro never done aught for you, Lazaro, in all his good fortune?" asked Ronald.

"Oh, senor! his lady wife, disliking that her brother-in-law should be treading a-foot over sierra and plain at a mule's tail, gave me the post of *Escrivano del Numero* at Truxillo, which I kept for somewhere about eight weeks. But I always grew sad when I heard the merry jangle of mules' bells; and one morning, unable to restrain myself longer, I tossed my Escrivano's cope and rod to *Satanas*, seized my whip and sombrero, and once more took to the road as a merry-hearted muleteer of Merida, and neither Pedro nor the condessa have been able to catch me since."

"I am happy to find you are such a philosopher," said Ronald, with a sigh, which was not unnoticed by the muleteer.

"I could say that, *Senor Caballero*, which would make you far happier," said he, with a glance of deep meaning. "But," he added, pointing to the armed bandit, who kept a look-out on the bartizan near them, "but there are unfriendly ears near us."

"Speak fearlessly, Lazaro;" said Ronald, eagerly, while his heart bounded with expectation. "I know that rascal to be a Guipuscoan, who understands as little of pure Castilian as of Greek. In Heaven's name, Lazaro, what have you to tell me? I implore you to speak!"

"Senor," said the muleteer, lowering his voice to a whisper, "you have thrice asked me about Don Alvaro, and I have thrice delayed to tell you what I know: good news should be divulged cautiously. Well, senor, the famous cavalier of Estremadura has encamped three hundred horse and foot among the mountains near Elizondo. He comes armed with a commission from the king, and his minister Don Diego de Avallo, to root out and utterly destroy this nest of wasps, or *cientipedoros*. The place is to be assailed about midnight; so look well to yourself, senor, that the villains do not poniard you in the fray; and, if you have any opportunity to aid us,

I need not ask you to do so. I am to be Don Alvaro's guide, as I know every foot of ground hereabout as well as I do at Merida, having paid toll here twenty times. But this will be my last visit of the kind; and I came hither only to reconnoitre and learn their pass-word, in case it should be needed. Keep a brave spirit in your breast for a few hours longer, senor, and perhaps, when the morning sun shines down the long valley yonder, Alosegui and his comrades will be hanging round the battlement, like beads on a chaplet. I pray to the Santa Gadea of Burgos that the night be dark, that we may the more easily take the rogues by surprise."

Ronald's astonishment and joy at the sudden prospect of liberation revealed to him by Lazaro Gomez, deprived him of the power of utterance for a time. He was about to display some extravagant signs of pleasure, and to embrace the muleteer, when the keen cold glance of the Guipuscoan bandit, who was watching them narrowly, recalled him to a sense of his danger. He almost doubted the reality of the story, and narrowly examined the broad countenance of the burly muleteer; but truth and honesty were stamped on every line of it. The horizon of Ronald's fortune was about to clear up again. He felt giddy—almost stunned with the suddenness of the intelligence, and his heart bounded with the wildest exultation at the prospect of speedy liberty, and of vengeance for the thousands of insults to which he had been subjected while a prisoner in the Torre de los Frayles.

When Lazaro departed, Stuart gave him the only token he could send to Don Alvaro,—a button of his coat, bearing a thistle and the number "92." He desired him to acquaint the cavalier that it would be requisite to provide planks to cross the chasm before the tower, otherwise the troops would fail to take its inmates by surprise.

This advice was the means of saving Stuart's life at a very critical juncture.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SPANISH LAW.

As nearly as Ronald could judge by the position of the sun,—being without a watch,—it was about the hour of three in the afternoon when Lazaro departed.

It was yet nine hours to midnight, and although that time seemed an age to look forward to, yet so full was his mind of joy, and crowding thoughts of gladness, hopes, and fears, that evening surprised him long before he imagined it to be near; and he had much ado in preserving his usual cold and serene look, and concealing the tumult of new ideas which excited him from the insolent bravoes, who were continually swaggering about, and, according to their usual wont, jostling him rudely at every corner and place where he encountered them. To remonstrate would have been folly, and to these petty annoyances he always submitted quietly.

On this last eventful evening he submitted to the penance of dining at the same table with the banditti, and even condescended to "trouble" his friend the padre for a piece of broiled kid; but, as soon as the repast was ended, he withdrew to the tower-head. He preferred to be alone, almost dreading that his important secret might be read by Alosegui, Cifuentes, or any other who bent his scowling and lack-lustre eyes upon him.

At times, too, there came into his mind a doubt of the truth of Lazaro's story; but that idea was too sickening to bear, and he dismissed it immediately.

The sun had set. Masses of dun clouds covered the whole sky, which gradually became streaked with crimson and gold to the westward, where the rays of the sun yet illumined and coloured the huge mountains of vapour, although his light was fast leaving the earth.

The appearance of the sky and aspect of the scenery were wonderful and glorious. The whole landscape was covered with a red hue, as if it had been deluged by a red shower. The mountain streamlet wound through the valley of the Torre de los Frayles, like a long gilded snake, towards the base of a dark mountain, where appeared part of the Bidassoa, gleaming under the warm sky like a river of liquid fire. Beautiful as the scene was, Ronald seemed too much occupied with his own stirring thoughts to admire it, or to survey any part with curiosity, save that which, by gradually assuming a more sombre hue, announced the approach of night. It was not easy for him to observe a landscape with an artist's eye, while placed in the predicament in which he then found himself.

He remembered, with peculiar bitterness, the countless mortifications and insults which he had received from Alosegui, the padre, and many others, and he contemplated with gloomy pleasure the display which these master-rogues would make when receiving, by the cord or the bullet, the just reward of all their enormities. He remembered with pleasure that he had never broken the parole of honour he had pledged to these miscreants—and truly he had been sorely tempted. Owing to their irregular and dissipated course of life, more than one opportunity of escape and flight had presented itself.

"I expect a storm to-night, senor," said Gaspar, breaking in abruptly on his meditations.

"Indeed, senor!"

The other swore a mighty oath, which I choose not to repeat. "*San Stephano el Martir! si, senor,*—and no ordinary storm either. We shall miss our prize of a rich hidalgo of Alava, who, with an escort of twenty armed men, would have departed to-night from a posada a few miles from this, and meant to bivouac at a place on the hill-side, of which the inn-keeper, who is an old friend of mine, sent us all due notice. Look you; *hombre!* the sky grows dark almost while we look upon it, and the clouds, in masses of black and red, descend on every side, like gloomy curtains, to shut out the sun from our view, and the wind, which blows against our faces, seems like the very breath of hell! Pooh! this is just such a night as one might expect to see our very good friend the devil abroad."

"He is no friend of mine, Senor Alosegui, although he may be a particular one of yours," said Ronald with a smile.

"By the holy house of Nazareth!" swore the bandit, "you may come to a close acquaintance with him after you have served for a time, as I expect you shall, in our honourable company."

"Well; but what of the storm?" asked Ronald, more interested about that, and unwilling to quarrel with his captor when there was so near a prospect of release. "What leads you to suppose there will be one to-night?"

"These few rain-drops now falling are large and round; hark, how they splash on the battlement! The valley, the sierra, the tower, the river, and everything bear a deep saffron tint, partaking of the hue of the troubled sky. *Santos!* we shall have a storm roaring among the mountains and leaping along the valleys to-night, which will cause the old drones monks at Maya to grow pale as they look upon each other's fat faces, and while they mumble their *aves*, count their beads, and bring forth the morsel of the true cross to scare away *Satanas* and his imps of evil. By the bye, speaking of Maya reminds me of your case, senor. A train of mules,

which crossed the Pyrenees without paying us our customary toll, are on their return homeward from Bayonne to Maya, laden with the very best of all the good things this world affords, for the use of the pious and abstaining fathers of the convent of Saint Francis. Forty men, commanded by Narvaez Cifuentes, will set out to-morrow to meet our friends in the Pass of Maya, and a sharp engagement will probably take place. A priest is with them; on his shoulder he bears the banner of Saint Francis of Assissi, but if they imagine that we hidalgos of fortune will respect it, the holy fathers are wofully mistaken. The mules are escorted by a party of armed peasants, commanded by an old acquaintance of Gorgorza, the padre Porko, who is as brave as the Cid, and has served with honour in the guerilla bands during the war of independence. The muleteers are all stout fellows, too, and being well armed with *cajados*, *trabucas*, and long knives, will likely show fight,—and, truly, Narvaez will see some sharp work. Now, hark you, senor; if you are willing to join him and his brave companions, you will have an opportunity of making your first essay as a cavalier of fortune under a very distinguished commander. Do this, senor, and you will live among us honoured and respected, as an equal, a friend, and a brave comrade. If you fall in conflict, all is at an end; but if taken by the authorities, to suffer martyrdom by the law on the gallows, the *garrote*, or the wheel, then you will have the glory of dying amid a vast multitude, upon whose sympathy the fame of your exploits will draw largely. You like not my proposition? Well, *senor caballero*, I have to acquaint you that I shall not be able to resist the fierce importunities of Narvaez Cifuentes, and those who are his particular friends. Their poniards are ready to leap from their scabbards against you now,—*now* that all chance of your being ransomed has failed. I have a sort of friendship for you, senor, because, instead of supplicating for life, you have rather seemed to defy fearlessly the terrors of death; the which stubborness of soul, if it wins not the pity, certainly excites the admiration of the jovial *picaros*, my comrades. You are a fine fellow over the chess-board or wine-cup, and your bearing would be complete if you would follow the example of Cifuentes, and swear and swagger a little at times. But you will acknowledge that the flowing ease of action and expression which distinguishes that accomplished cavalier, are difficult of imitation."

"I must confess they are, Senor Gaspar," replied Ronald, who could scarcely help smiling at the other's manner, which had in it a strange mixture of impudence, and part serious, part banter. "But I have really no desire to become the pupil of your friend."

"As you please, *amigo mio*; as you please," replied Alosegui, speaking slowly as he puffed at his cigar; for, like a true Spaniard, he smoked from the time he opened his eyes in the morning till he closed them again at night. "I once saw you perform the bandit to the very life in the *Posada de los Representes* at Aranjuez, when the British officers acted *La Gitana*, and some of Lope de Vega's pieces, for the amusement of themselves and the ladies of the city. You are a superb imitator, and, under the tuition of Narvaez, would, I doubt not, fulfil my utmost expectations."

"The devil take Narvaez!" muttered Ronald, who was getting impatient of Gaspar's style of speech.

"All in good time," said the other quietly. "You have been enemies of old, I believe; some affair of rivalry, in which Cifuentes was successful. I understand perfectly; but in our community among the Pyrenees here, we have no such petty feelings of dislike. However, senor," continued the robber, suddenly changing his satirical tone for a stern and bullying one; "however, I would have you to think well of all I have said, as I should be sorry to see your bones cast into the vast depth of the chasm, to swell the

grisly company there. So give me a definite answer to-morrow, senor, before Narvaez departs for Maya, or fatal results may ensue."

He flourished the paper cigar which he held between two fingers, and withdrew, nodding significantly as his tall and bulky figure descended the narrow staircase leading down from the paved roof of the tower.

Ronald, who was glad of his strange friend's departure, turned again to watch the long vista of the valley, which was now involved in darkness. He would probably have remained there till midnight, but he was soon compelled to follow Alosegui, as the storm, which had long been threatening, now descended in all its fury.

The atmosphere became dense and close, while the sky grew rapidly darker and darker, till it assumed the dreary blackness of a winter night, and an ocean of rain descended on the earth with such violence, that it was a wonder the little tower was not levelled beneath it like a house of cards. The thunder-peals were grand and sublime: louder and louder than a thousand broadsides, they roared as if heaven and earth were coming together.

The banditti grew pale as they viewed each other's grim visages in the blue glare of the lightning. They grew pale as death, and their "felon souls" quaked within them, for there is a terrible something in the sound of thunder, which appals most men. It seems like God's own voice speaking in the firmament.

But Alosegui called for lights and for liquor, and pig-skins and jars were speedily set abroach; the half-ruined hall was soon illuminated by candles of all sorts and sizes, which streamed and guttered, untrimmed and unheeded, in the currents of air that passed freely through the place, although the crazy windows were covered up with boards, and stuffed with cloaks, bags of straw, &c. to keep out the wind and rain.

Assembled in the dilapidated hall, if it deserved such a name, the banditti withdrew their guards and scouts, and forgot the storm without amid the laughter and brutal uproar of their carousal. Wine and the strong heady *aguadiente*—a liquor not unlike Scottish whisky,—were flowing like water, and the noise within the Torre de los Frayles almost equalled the uproar of the elements without.

Ronald's spirits fell, and he grew sad; he expected that there would be no attack that night, and he pitied the unfortunate soldiers who were exposed on a night-march to such a storm. From old experience he well knew the misery of such a duty. He withdrew from the scene of bandit merriment, and seeking a solitary place, watched the elemental war without, and gazed with mingled awe and pleasure on the bright streaks of forked lightning as they darted through the sky, lighting up the shattered cliffs, the mountain tops, the deep valley, and the swollen river,—displaying them vividly, tinging them all over with a pale sulphurous blue, and causing the whole scene to assume a wild and ghastly appearance. Again the thunder roared, then died away, and nought could be heard but the howling wind, and the rain rushing fiercely down from the parted clouds.

After continuing for about two hours, the storm at last began to abate, and Stuart's hopes of freedom revived. It yet wanted some hours of midnight, but he greatly feared that the fury of such a tempest would scatter Don Alvaro's command of horse and foot, drench them to the skin, and destroy their arms and ammunition. Yet he still continued at the loophole, watching the dispersion of the clouds, the appearance of the stars, and the increasing light of the moon as the successive shrouds of gauze-like vapour withdrew from her shining face.

While thus engaged, he was aroused by the sound of some one standing behind him. He turned sharply round, and beheld Cifuentes, flushed with

his potations, and ripe for brawl and uproar, reeling about with a horn of liquor in one hand and a drawn stiletto in the other. In his drunken insolence he dashed the cup, which was full of the rich wine of Ciudad Real, in Ronald's face, and he was for a moment almost blinded by the liquor. Full of fury at the insult, he rushed upon the robber, and grasping him by his strong and bull-like neck, tripped up his heels and hurled him to the floor in a twinkling. He dashed the head of the aggressor twice on the pavement to stun him, and wresting the poniard from his grasp, would inevitably have slain him with it, had he not been prevented by the interference of the *ci-devant* padre Gorgorza and others. He was grasped from behind and drawn away from his antagonist, who had very little breath left in his body after such a knock-down. Drawn daggers were gleaming on every side; but the ruffians stood so much in awe of Alosegui's formidable strength and vengeance, that they longed yet feared to strike Stuart with their weapons. In the grasp of so many, his arms were pinioned fast, so that his rage could only be indicated by the heaving of his breast, by the fire which glared in his eyes, and by the swollen veins of his forehead.

A short pause ensued, until Narvaez staggered up from the floor, completely sobered, but at the same time completely infuriated by the assault which he had sustained. He at first howled like a wild beast, and sprang upon his helpless prisoner with the intention of poniarding him on the spot; but suddenly changing his mind, he laughed wildly, and swore and muttered while pointing to a rope which, unhappily, was at that time dangling from the stone mullion of a window, about twelve feet from the floor, and he proposed to hang Stuart here. The idea was greeted with a perfect storm of yells and applause.

A cold perspiration burst over the form of the captive, and he struggled with a strength and determination of which hitherto he had believed himself incapable; but his efforts were as those of a child, in the hands of so many. He had to contend with forty devils incarnate, well armed, and flushed with rage and wine.

How eagerly at that moment Stuart longed for the appearance of Alvaro, and how deeply he deplored his having given loose to passion, when, by restraining it, another hour had perhaps seen him free! But he longed in vain, for Alvaro came not, and his regrets were fruitless. He was to die now, and by the ignominious cord!

As they dragged him across the apartment, he called frantically on Alosegui; but that worthy lay on the floor in a corner insensible,—or perhaps, pretending to be so,—from the quantity of liquor he had imbibed. In this dreadful extremity, when hovering on the very verge of death, Ronald condescended to remind Cifuentes that he saved his life at Merida, when Don Alvaro was about to hang him like a cur, in the chapter-house of a convent there.

But Narvaez only grinned, as, with the assistance of his great row of teeth, he knotted a loop on the cord, and said that it was by the rope, the bullet, or the dagger, he always paid his debts, and that he had permitted Stuart to live too long to satisfy his scruples as an honourable Spaniard.

"Up with him, *amigos mios!*" cried he, flourishing the hateful noose. "*Carajo!* pull, and with a strong hand!"

At that moment Ronald uttered a cry of triumphant joy; Narvaez dropped the cord, and the banditti started back, cowering with alarm. The stairs and the doorway of the apartment were filled with soldiers, the sight of whose bristling bayonets, with the shout of "Death to the *bandidos! Viva el Rey!*" struck terror on the recreant garrison of the Torre de los Frayles. Several officers rushed forward with their swords drawn; and in

the tall cavalier with the steel helmet, corslet, and cavalry uniform, Ronald recognized his old friend Alvaro de Villa Franca.

"Dogs and villains!" he exclaimed, "surrender! But expect no mercy; for I swear to you, by the head of the king, that ye shall all die, and before another day dawns,—ay, every man of you!"

By this time the hall was crowded by about fifty infantry, while a number of dismounted dragoons, armed with their swords and carbines, occupied the stair and adjacent passages. The cowards whose den had been so suddenly surprised, forgetting to use the weapons with which they were so well equipped, fell upon their knees,—every man excepting Narvaez. They cried for mercy in the most abject terms; but the cavalier turned a deaf ear to their entreaties, as they had done to hundreds before.

"Senor Don Ronald!" said he, embracing Stuart, "our Lady has been singularly favourable to us to-night. We toiled our way over these rocky mountains, notwithstanding the storm, and have truly arrived at a most critical moment. Our friends of the Friars', or rather the Thieves' Tower, shall find that I have not made a fruitless journey from Madrid. But first allow me to introduce an old friend, Don Pedro Gomez."

A number of ceremonious Castilian bows were exchanged, after which the cavalier continued,—

"Immediately on receiving your letter, and obtaining all the information requisite about this den of the devil, I ordered the bearer, Juan—Juan—I forget his name, to be hanged; and, waiting on Diego de Avallo, our secretary for home affairs, I procured a commission under the great seal to proceed as I chose in the duty of rooting out this nest of ruffians, who have so long been the terror of the country hereabout; and by the sacred shrine of the Virgin del Pilar! I will avenge your captivity and their crimes most signally. Guard well the staircase and doorway with our own troopers, Don Pedro."

The *ci-devant* serjeant was garbed and equipped like Alvaro, and had evidently acquired very much the air of a well-bred cavalier.

Excepting Alosegui, who stared about him with an air of drunken stupidity, the robbers were completely sobered, and remained on their knees, crying for mercy,—mercy in the name of the Holy Virgin, of her Son, of the saints, and in the name of Heaven; but stern looks and charged bayonets were the only, and certainly fitting reply, and one by one they were stripped of their poniards and pistols, which were broken and destroyed by the soldiers. Narvaez alone scorned to kneel, but he stood scowling around him with a dogged, sullen, and pale visage, while his knees quaked and trembled violently.

"Alvaro," said Stuart, "look upon this sulky ruffian, who is too proud, or perhaps too frightened, to kneel."

"Cifuentes of Albuquerque!" cried the stern cavalier, in a tone almost rising into a shriek. "*Dios mio!* the destroyer of Catalina, of my poor sister! Ah, master-fiend! most daring of villains! Heaven has at last delivered you to me, that you may receive the reward of your long life of crime. At last you shall die by my hand!" He was about to run him through the heart, but checked the half-given thrust.

"No!" he continued, "you shall *not* die thus. To fall by my sword is a death fit for a hidalgo or cavalier. Thou shalt pass otherwise from this earth to hell, and die like a dog as thou art!"

Taking his heavy Toledo sabre by the blade, he aimed a blow at Narvaez, which demolished his lower jaw, and laid him on the floor. Upon the throat of the writhing robber he placed the heel of his heavy jack-boot, and watched, without the slightest feeling of compunction or remorse, the horrible distortions and death agonies exhibited in his visage, and from his

compressed throat withdrew not his foot till he had completely strangled him, and he lay a blackened, bloated, and disfigured corse on the floor.

"At length Catalina is avenged!" exclaimed the cavalier, turning with fierce exultation to Stuart, who had witnessed without regret or interference the retribution which had so suddenly hurled the once-formidable Narvaez to the shades.

The fears of the banditti were renewed on beholding this terrible scene, and again they implored piteously to be spared, offering to become Alvaro's slaves, imploring that they might be sent to dig in his mines in Estramadura, or sent to the galleys, or anywhere,—but, oh! to spare their wretched lives, and they would offend against God and man no more. The stern cavalier listened as if he heard them not. He ordered them to be pinioned; and Lazaro Gomez appearing with a huge bundle of the cords with which he bound his mules' packages, tied the *ladrones* in pairs, binding them hard and fast back to back.

Meanwhile some of the soldiers were ransacking the tower "from turret to foundation-stone," expecting to find vaults and strong rooms piled with vast heaps of treasure. But the *soldados* were wofully disappointed; not a cross or coin fell into their hands, save what they obtained in the pouches of the thieves, whom they pricked remorselessly with their bayonets and otherwise maltreated, to force them to reveal where their plunder was deposited.

Whether the wretches were obstinate, or had nothing to conceal, I know not; but the exasperation of the soldiers was greatly increased when they discovered that they should return without the gold, the jewellery, and the consecrated images, with which they hoped to have stuffed their havresacks.

"This is well," said Alvaro, watching with grim satisfaction the adroit manner in which Lazaro linked the rogues together. "On my honour, Lazaro, you should have been a general instead of a mule-driver. But what is wisdom in the former, the world stigmatizes as mere cunning in the latter. Believe me, Senor Stuart, the entire success of this expedition is principally owing to this sturdy rogue of Merida, on whom I would bestow a cherry-cheeked bride and a thousand hard ducats, if he would only quit mule-driving, and settle quietly down within the sound of the bells of San Juan. He was our guide to-night during the whole of the tempest, and notwithstanding its fury and the darkness, which was so intense that I could scarcely see my horse's ears, he conducted us up the mountains, by some chasm or gorge, safely and surely, horse and foot, as only the devil—"

"Or a muleteer of Merida, senor."

"Ay, Lazaro, or a muleteer of Merida, could have done. He provided planks for us to cross the chasm here, which otherwise must have brought us to a dead halt; and it was entirely owing to his tact and observation that we were enabled to surprise the villains at so critical a time. A sore penance you must have endured, my friend, in spending so many months in such company; but it might be the less regretted, as it will probably go to your account of time in purgatory. You shall have most ample satisfaction, however, before the night is much older, for all the injuries you have suffered from them."

Ronald was so much overjoyed at his deliverance, that he could scarcely find words to express his feelings, and the obligations which he owed to Don Alvaro; but, with a spirit of forgiveness highly honourable, he began to intercede for the lives of some of the banditti, who had not made themselves quite so obnoxious as the rest while he was kept in durance among them; but Alvaro replied, that the commands of Don Diego de Avallo,

the Spanish minister, expressly enjoined that no quarter should be given, as it was the intention of government to strike a general terror into the banditti which infested every part of the country, and that they must be cut off, root and branch. Ronald then proposed that they should be marched down the mountains to Vittoria, or any other town, and there delivered over to the civil authorities; but Villa Franca said that he had no time to spare, and the horde of the Torre de los Frayles must be instantly disposed of.

"We settle these matters quicker in Spain than you do in Britain, where the military are so simple as to permit themselves to be ruled by alcaldes and lawyers," said the cavalier, smiling and waving his hand with a decided air. "So we will leave these humbled bravoes to the tender care of Don Pedro Gomez, and then take our departure for the town of Maya, to which our horses will convey us in a few hours. Thank Heaven, the storm has completely passed away, and the appearance of the moon gives promise of a glorious night. Without her assistance we should assuredly break our necks in descending from this cursed eagle's nest."

The soldiers fell back respectfully, as Ronald and Alvaro left the crowded hall. Ronald's heart was dancing with delight as they descended the worn and dilapidated stair, upon the steps of which he had not trodden for five months since the unhappy night on which he first entered this Pyrenean prison-house. Pausing a moment, to direct that the head of Cifuentes should be struck off, according to the Spanish custom, and placed upon a pole in the Pass of Maya, the cavalier descended after Stuart. But the despairing cries and fervent supplications of the prisoners followed them; and some, on finding that their last moment was come, began to shriek for a priest in the most heart-rending accents of superstitious terror and despair: but no priest was there, to hear their horrible confessions.

"*A padre, a padre, O noble senores! A padre, por amor de Santa Maria, el Madre de Dios!*" howled the despairing Gorgorza de la Puente, as the soldiers dragged him forth. "Noble cavalier, valiant soldiers! destroy me not, body and soul! I am a holy priest, senores! Oh! I was one once. Hear me, for the love of Heaven! I have much to repent of, and terrible things to confess. I poniarded a monk in San Sebastian, and stole the holy vessels from his altar. I—I—"

"Quick with the rope!" cried Pedro. "Twist it about his neck, and stop his mouth before he raises his master the devil, by speaking thus."

"Mercy! mercy!" shrieked the other, struggling furiously, as three stout soldiers dragged him to the summit of the tower. "Mercy yet a little while! I carried off a lady of Subijana de Alava, and robbed her of life and honour among the mountains. I robbed—holy saints! good soldiers! will no one hear my confession? Can no one hear me?—can no man forgive me? Accursed may ye be! bloody wolves and pitiless—*O misericordia, mio Dios! O Santissima Maria!*" and he was launched into eternity.

Nearly twenty men were pouring forth rhapsodies like the above, and the tower became filled with sounds of lamentation, shrieks, and cries,—groans, prayers, and the wildest blasphemy mingled with the most pious ejaculations; but it was a just retribution which had fallen upon these wicked men.

Ronald's heart beat lightly as he crossed the terrible chasm, where so many unfortunates had found a tomb. He had been a captive—on the very verge of death, and now he was free, and "himself again."

The bright moon was shining aloft like a globe of silver, and the dewy sides of the hills, the rivulets which trickled from the rocks, the

sleepy stream at the bottom of the valley, and every violet-cup and blade of grass were gleaming in its radiant light.

At a little distance from the chasm were a party of Alvaro's cavalry, escorting the horses of those who were engaged in the tower, and their tall lance-heads, bright helmets and cuirasses, were flashing and glittering in the moonlight. Their caparisoned war-horses were sleek-skinned and long-tailed Andalusians, and were cropping the grass with their bridles loose.

"Pedro is a rough dog," said the cavalier, looking complacently back. "He is stringing a fair chaplet for the devil in the merry moonlight. In ten minutes he will have the *ladrones* all dangling over the battlement. *Santos!* 'tis not work for soldiers' hands; but the dogs deserve not to die by military weapons, for they are as arrant cowards as ever blanched before the eye of a brave man. Look back, just now, Don Ronald!"

Ronald turned round, and beheld with disgust the Spanish soldiers forcing the pinioned banditti over the walls, where they hung by the neck, dangling and writhing in couples. Although he was at some distance from the tower, he could distinctly perceive their convulsions, and heard their heels rattling against the walls, from the ruinous battlement of which the stones were tumbling every instant into the chasm with a thundering sound, which caused the horses of the lancers to snort and rear. It was a ghastly sight.

"Now, then, ho for Maya! I believe we shall find our way across the mountains without the aid of Lazaro, now the bright moon is shining with such splendour," was the exclamation of Alvaro as they mounted and set forth. Stuart rode beside him on the horse of an orderly, and four Spanish lancers followed as an escort. They descended towards the valley by the steep and perilous pathway, which was so narrow as to admit but one horseman at a time, and often overhung the abyss, passing so close to the edge of the beetling crags, that the eye scarcely dared to scan the depth below. It was well for the riders that the horses they rode had been accustomed to stand fire, otherwise some lives might have been lost as they descended the rocks. Before they were half-way down, a sudden glare shot across the sky from the mountains above them. A terrific shock and explosion followed, and the rock of the Torre de los Frayles was seen enveloped in a cloud of black smoke, which, after curling upwards, floated away through the clear blue sky.

"Keep your horses tight by the head!" cried Alvaro, as his mettlesome steed kicked and plunged in the narrow path, whilst Ronald expected to see him vanish over the rocks every second. "Draw well on the curb, senors; or, *diavolo!* some of us will be in the other world presently!"

Their cattle, however, were soon quieted, and Stuart again looked towards the place where the Torre de los Frayles had stood, but no trace of the tower was visible. The smoke had dispersed, and the rock was bare. The sound of a cavalry trumpet, calling "to mount," was heard soon afterwards, and the roll of an infantry drum echoed away among the mountains.

"Pedro has put powder in the vaults and blown up the place, that it may never again become a nest for such birds of prey," said Alvaro. "'Tis a tower of friars or thieves no longer, but in one moment has been dashed into fifty thousand fragments of stone. Here comes Pedro on our rear; the troop are descending the hill."

As he spoke, a long line of glittering casques and spears, moving in single file, appeared descending the rocks, and vanishing in succession under the shadow of the impending cliff, behind which the moon was shining, and casting long gigantic shadows across the valley below. The

soldiers brought with them the now crest-fallen and dejected Alosegui, who, as Ronald's former preserver and defender, was, at his earnest intercession, alone permitted to escape the terrible retribution so successfully wrought on his guilty confrères.

On inquiring about Carlos de Avalio, to whose evil influence Ronald believed his captivity to have been mainly owing, Villa Franca informed him that a duel had taken place between that violent young cavalier and Don Alvarado. It had been fought on the *Puerta del Sol* of Elizondo, about mid-day, four months previously, and ended by Carlos being run through the body by Alvarado, who, to escape the vengeance of his victim's uncle, Don Diego, had absconded to South America, and had not been since heard of.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN ACQUAINTANCE, AND "OLD ENGLAND ON THE LEE."

"PHO!" said the count, as they rode into Maya, "amid all the things of which we have been talking, I had quite forgotten to say that there is a countryman of yours here in this town, one who takes the utmost interest in your concerns—why I know not; he said he was no relative. We became acquainted at Madrid, and, on hearing of your story, he proposed at once to accompany me in this expedition against the robbers in the Pyrenees and other places. He is a spirited, but rather impetuous old cavalier. He has seen service, too, in the Low Countries and other parts, but appears of late to have become somewhat addicted to ease and good living, which has enlarged the circumference of his stomach more than he wishes, and has rendered him subject to a disease we know little of in Spain,—the gout. A sudden fit of it seized him when we were marching *en route* to your rescue, and the worthy hidalgo was compelled, much against his will, to quarter himself in Maya till our return. He awaits us yonder in the *Posada de los Caballeros*, opposite to the convent of Saint Francis.

This being nearly the whole of the information respecting "his countryman," with which Alvaro was able to furnish his companion, Ronald was not a little surprised, on alighting at the miserable posada, to find reclining, in dressing-gown and slippers, in an easy chair, with one leg, swollen and swathed in flannel, resting on a footstool, and with a heap of newspapers, guide-books, decanters, cigars, a brace of pistols, and a light-dragoon sabre displayed upon a table before him, no less a person than his noble competitor the Earl of Hyndford. The earl received his young rival kindly, displayed much generous feeling towards him as a brother soldier, laughed heartily at his scarecrow appearance,—for his long residence in the tower had told immensely upon Ronald's rather scanty wardrobe,—and finally, after having heard his story, and repeatedly and energetically d—d the banditti, the Horse Guards, the gout, and the Peninsula, and having assured his young friend that though there might have been a little weeping, and so forth, on his account at home, there were no broken hearts nor any symptoms of forgetfulness, he promised him—on behalf of his friend "York," with whom he had formerly served as aide-de-camp, and his friend Hal Torrens, who, though a war-office man and a staff officer, was a good fellow enough—the immediate restoration of his forfeited commission, and letters to the parties named that should put all right with respect to it.

While a prisoner in the Torre de los Frayles, Ronald had remained in total ignorance of several events of some importance; and, though he was

by no means astonished to learn from the earl that his name had disappeared from the army list, and that he was superseded, it did occasion him some slight surprise to learn that Buonaparte had escaped from Elba, that he had entered Paris in triumph, and was once more at the head of the French army, surrounded by many of his old marshals, and supported by the old enthusiasm of his devoted soldiers. His own regiment, Ronald heard, had been ordered to Flanders, where some sharp fighting was expected to occur forthwith.

Three days afterwards he found himself on board the packet at Passages, bound for London.

On his parting with Alvaro, that cavalier presented him with his own gold cross of St. Jago, begging him to wear it as a token of remembrance. It was not without feelings of the deepest regret that he bade adieu to this noble and chivalric Spaniard; and he felt all that depression of spirit which a frank and honest heart unavoidably suffers after a leave-taking. Hyndford he expected to meet again, but the cavalier of Merida never. However, such sensations of regret were transitory; he had followed the drum too long to find parting with a brave or merry companion a new matter.

The vessel cast anchor in the Downs at night. It had "come to blow a sodger's wind," as the skipper said,—that is, a foul one; and there was no getting up the river at that time, when the goodly invention of steam-tugs was as yet unknown.

Next morning he landed with his baggage at Deal, and started in a post-chaise for London. Immediately on his arrival there, he despatched letters to Colonel Cameron, to Inchavon, and Lochisla, giving an account of the perils attendant on his detention in Spain, and safe arrival in England. In the fulness of his joy, he also wrote to Sir Colquhoun Menteith, of Cairntowis, a near relation, with whom his family had ever been at variance, and maintained a petty personal feud. But the old baronet never acknowledged the receipt of his letter, which caused Ronald to regret deeply that he had ever written to him or his son, who was then serving with the army in Flanders. The letter addressed to the old laird lay long at the post-house of Strathfillan, and turned from white to saffron in the window, among tape and needles, pins and thread-reels, until at last it was torn up and destroyed.

The others were received in due course by those to whom they were addressed, and all, save that to Sir Colquhoun, caused joy and congratulation; and so long did the mess continue discussing his adventures, in all their various lights and shades, through the medium of the sixth, seventh, and eighth *allowances*, that it is credibly reported that only a third of the officers appeared on parade in the Park of Brussels next morning.

On the day after his arrival, Stuart repaired to the Horse Guards, to wait on the Duke of York, the commander-in-chief. He had no doubt that his case would be heard favourably by the good duke, whose well-known kindness and fellow-feeling for his brothers of the sword gained him the appropriate sobriquet of the "soldier's friend;" and he was one to whom the wife, the widow, or the child of a soldier, in their sorrow or destitution, never made an appeal in vain. His Royal Highness was not at the Horse Guards that day, and Ronald was received by Sir Henry Torrens, a plump little man, whom he imagined at first to be the very personification of staff-office hauteur; but found, on further acquaintance, to be all that Hyndford painted him, and a deuced good fellow besides.

He received Stuart kindly, inquired after many of his old friends, opened his eyes widely at what he called the audacity of the brigands in detaining a British officer, read attentively the letters of Alvaro and Hyndford, ap-

peared to take great interest in the affair, and gave the ominous official promise "to see what could be done."

Three days afterwards, however, an orderly of the Life Guards brought Ronald an official packet from Sir Henry, notifying his re-appointment, and containing two orders,—one to proceed forthwith to join in Flanders, "where his services were much required;" and the other on the Paymaster-general for all his arrears of pay, and other sums due to him by Government, £400 "blood money" for wounds, and eighty guineas as compensation for the loss of his baggage when the Pass of Maya was forced by Marshal Soult two years before.

Ronald blessed the liberality of John Bull, who had not forgotten the fright of Napoleon's threatened invasion, and was more inclined to be grateful to his sons then, than now. The money-orders were very acceptable things, as they relieved Ronald from the necessity of drawing upon his father, whose involvements and expenses he supposed to be sufficient already.

"This is excellent," thought he. "I can now repay Hyndford, and travel comfortably post to Brussels. But yet, 'tis vexatious to proceed forthwith. I held out hopes to Alice, and the people in Perthshire, of seeing them all soon. Well, 'tis the fortune of war, and repining is worse than useless."

So he thought, as he elbowed his way along the crowded Strand towards the office of Mr. Bruce, the regimental agent, humming gaily as he went the old song—

> "Oh, the Lowlands of Holland,
> Have parted my love and me," &c.

Most willingly, however, would he have applied for a short leave of absence, now so eminently his due, to enable him to pay a brief visit to his Perthshire friends, and see once again his beloved Alice before encountering anew the perils and hardships of war; but the exigencies of the service were pressing, his orders peremptory, and the fear of missing the glory of a new campaign reconciled him to the necessity of a speedy departure. He applied himself diligently to the business of instant preparation, and found relief for his excited feelings in the bustle attendant on acquiring a new outfit. A short time sufficed to procure him the necessary equipage for camp and field, and he was soon ready to resume active military duties.

CHAPTER XX.

FLANDERS.

A few days afterwards he was on his way, hastening to join the army in Belgium. His orders were to travel with speed, as hostilities were expected daily. All Europe was alarmed, great events were expected, and mail and telegraph arrivals were watched with the most feverish anxiety.

On landing at Ostend, Stuart heard that Buonaparte had joined the French army, and had issued a proclamation calling to mind their former victories, and telling them that fresh dangers were to be dared and battles won; but he felt assured their familiarity with hardship and death, their steadiness, discipline, and inherent bravery, would make them, in every encounter, most signally victorious.

"Time will prove all this," thought Ronald, as, seated on an inverted keg, he was deciphering this proclamation in a French paper, while travelling on the canal of Ostend in a flat-bottomed boat for Bruges.

The broad and waveless surface of the long yellow canal was gleaming under the meridian sun like polished metal; and, when standing erect on the roof or upper deck of the barge, he could see it for miles winding away through the country, which on every side was verdant and flat, like a vast bowling-green. The monotony of the scenery struck Stuart the more forcibly, because, as a Highlander, he could not help drawing comparisons between it and the tremendous hills, the solemn valleys, and the majestic rivers of his native Scotland. At times, a few bulbous-shaped boors, in steeple-crowned hats, or fur caps, and enormous breeches, appeared on the canal bank, singly or in groups, smoking their long pipes, and staring hard with their great lack-lustre eyes on the passing boat, the slow motion of which they would watch for miles, standing on the same spot, immovable as a milestone. Very plump and very red-cheeked country girls, wearing short petticoats, and making an unusual display of legs, which were more substantial than elegant, appeared tripping along the banks, bearing jars of milk or butter on their heads, where they were poised with miraculous exactness. Sometimes a party of these rustic fair ones passed in a gaudily-painted cart or waggon, all laughing and talking merrily,—their noisy vivacity forming a strange contrast with the sulky demeanour of the silent and phlegmatic boor, who sat smoking and driving on the tram of the car, keeping his seat there with the same lurching motion that a bag of oats would have done. There is little disposition in Dutch or German blood to be gallant or cavalierlike.

Afar in the distance, where the landscape stretched away as level as the sea, were seen great squares of light green or bright yellow, showing where lay the fields of golden corn and other grain, waving, ripe and tall, everywhere ready for the sickle. In some places appeared a cluster of pretty little cottages, their walls white as alabaster, and roofed with bright yellow thatch, embosomed among a grove of light willow-trees, from the midst of which arose the tall and slender church spire, surmounted by a clumsy vane, around which flew scores of cawing rooks, fluttering and contesting for footing on the gilded weathercock. Sometimes the canal barge passed through the very midst of a farm and close to the mansion, with its deep, thatched roof, having walls of glaring white or yellow, and gaudy red or blue streaks six inches broad painted round each door and window,—the brass knocker on the green door, the burnished windows, the gilt vanes, and painted walls, all gleaming in the light of the sun. Contrasting with the rural dwelling, the parterres before it, the stack-yard behind, the ducks, the geese, the pigs, and the children in the yard, or among the reeds by the canal bank, appeared, perhaps close by a vessel of two hundred tons or so, laid up in ordinary, or high and dry in the farmyard, with hens roosting beside her keel. In some places these craft lay in small docks having a flood-gate, with their top-masts struck, their rigging and spars all dismantled, and stowed away below or on deck. Most of the Dutch and Belgian farmers are also shipowners; and by means of those great and beautiful canals, which like veins intersect the whole country, they bring their craft to their farmyards, perhaps fifty or eighty miles inland, and there keep them during the winter. They can thus the more readily load or provision them with their own farm produce, before they are again sent to sea.

As Ronald was totally ignorant of Dutch, and knew very little of French, he could neither converse with the boatmen nor the dull Flemish boors who happened to be passengers; and he passed his time monotonously enough, yawning over a few London newspapers, or watching every *schuytje* sculled along by its "twenty-breeched" boatmen.

In the evening he arrived at the busy and opulent, but smoky town of

Bruges; and hence, passing the night at an hotel, and rising next morning with the lark, he proceeded to Ghent, that city of bustle and bridges. On landing at one of the quays, he was surprised to observe a French soldier on sentry, walking briskly about before his box. When passing, monsieur came smartly to "his front," and presented arms. In traversing the streets, he met many French officers in undress, all of whom politely touched their caps on passing. They all wore their swords and belts, and were to be seen promenading everywhere, singly or in parties, in the streets, on the bridges, on the quays, or flirting with the girls who kept the booths and fancy warehouses in the great square.

At the portal of a large and handsome mansion, a British soldier of the line, and a Frenchman in the uniform of the garde-du-corps, were on duty *together* as sentinels. It was the residence of Louis XVIII., who, on the landing of Buonaparte, had accepted the asylum offered him by the King of the Netherlands, and now resided in Ghent, spending his time like some plodding citizen, when he should have been in the field aiding his allies, and heading the few soldiers of France who still remained true to him. A British guard was mounted at his residence, in addition to the garde-du-corps, and the officers dined every day at the royal table.

Of the French army, about seven hundred officers and a thousand soldiers remained stanch to Louis, when the whole of their comrades joined Napoleon *en masse*. The privates were all quartered at Alost, but the officers he kept near his own person.

Warlike preparations were manifest everywhere around Ghent. Nearly eight thousand men were employed in repairing the ancient fortifications and raising new, digging ditches, mounting cannon, erecting bulwarks, forts, and gates; for rumours of the coming strife, and of the invasion of Flanders by Buonaparte and his furious Frenchmen, were compelling the drowsy people to lay aside their phlegm, and show some courage, energy, and activity.

In the evening Ronald was roused by the ringing of the church-bells, as for an alarm. A commotion and noise arose in the city, as if the people of Ghent had suddenly cast off their apathy, and set all their tongues to work. Above the increasing din, he heard the officers and soldiers of the garde-du-corps crying *Vive le Roi! Vive Louis!* in that true turn-coat style for which the French had become so notorious. Conceiving it to be some unlooked-for attack, he clasped on his belt, and repaired to a neighbouring *table d'hôte*, where a French officer informed him that the uproar was caused by the arrival of a courier, bearing intelligence that the entire French army was in motion, and headed by the Emperor,—while he spoke, a flush crossed his cheek, betraying the enthusiasm he could not conceal, —led by *their* Emperor, had crossed the Sambre, and were marching on Charleroi.

Anxious to join his regiment before hostilities began, and being heartily tired of the slow and chilly mode of travelling by canal barges, Stuart purchased a horse at Ghent, as no Belgian would lend one for hire. It was a poor-looking hack, and he paid for it thrice its real value. Leaving his baggage to be sent after him, he set off on the spur for Brussels, among whose plodding citizens the advance of the French had stricken a terror beyond description. But two alternatives were before them in case of Wellington's defeat,—flight, or to remain and encounter sack and slaughter; for well they knew that Napoleon would fearfully avenge the abandonment of his standard.

Ronald departed from Ghent at daybreak, and halted for breakfast at Alost. He repaired to an hotel, where his uniform procured him every attention, but there was consternation pre-eminently visible in every Bel-

gian face. Here he was informed that the first corps of the Prussian army, posted at Charleroi, under the command of General Zeithen, had been attacked, and, after a sharp contest, compelled to retreat towards Fleurs. Notwithstanding their fears, the people boasted much of the Belgian troops, and declared that, when the strife was fairly begun, they would do wonders.

"Ah, why should we fear?" they repeated continually. "Lord Wellington has the Belgians with him."

Having been misdirected and sent far out of his way by one of the terrified natives, it was dark before the young soldier arrived at Brussels, where confusion, fear, and uproar reigned supreme. He was permitted to pass the fortifications and barriers only, after a great deal of troublesome altercation with the Belgic and German sentries and guards, who scrupled to admit an armed man without the parole. After entering, he found his poor horse in a state of the utmost exhaustion. He had ridden nearly forty miles that day, and stood greatly in need of refreshment himself; but he was determined to travel on without halting, and to join the regiment at all risk and expense. He went straight to an hotel, and hired another horse, leaving twice its value, together with the Bucephalus he had purchased at Ghent, which was to be restored him on his return—when that should take place.

The French army were still pressing impetuously forward. Marshal Ney, in command of the left, had proceeded along the road for Brussels, and attacking the Prince of Saxe Weimar, drove him back from Frasnes to the famous position named *Les Quatre Bras;* while Napoleon, with his own immediate command, the right and centre, followed the retreating Prussians towards Brie and Sombref.

At half-past three on that morning (the 16th June), the British had marched out of Brussels towards the enemy. Fear was impressed on every heart and visible on every face after their departure.

The bells were tolling mournfully, and many persons were lamenting in the streets, as if the day of universal doom was at hand. The churches were lighted for night-service when Stuart entered the city. From the tall Gothic windows of the church of St. Gudule, vivid flakes of variously-tinted light streamed on the groups of anxious and gossiping citizens, who were assembled in knots and crowds in the great Sablon-square, or on the magnificent flight of steps ascending to the doorway, through which streams of radiance, and strains of choral music, came gushing into the streets below. The bells in the two great towers were booming away in concert with others, and flinging their deep hollow tones to the midnight wind. Business of every kind was suspended; the shops were shut; and the pauncky magistrates were all in the *Hôtel de Ville*, assembled in solemn conclave, consulting, not about the best means of defence, but the best mode—to use a homely phrase—"of cutting their stick," and without beat of drum.

CHAPTER XXI.

CAMERON OF FASSIFERN.

As soon as the military traveller presented himself before the cathedral of St. Gudule, the lustre streaming from the sixteen illuminated chapels of which filled the surrounding streets with a light rivalling that of day, a dense crowd gathered around him, barring his passage on every side, and clamorously demanding, "What news from the army?"

It was with the utmost difficulty that he could make these terrified cits understand he was bound for the field, and wished to know which way the British troops had marched. His only reply from them was, "The French—the French are coming on!" Fear had besotted them. He told them they would serve Belgium better by getting arms and joining her allies, than by thronging the streets like frightened sheep. This was answered by a groan, and the feeble cry of "*vivat!*"

Cursing them for cowards, in his impatience to get on, he spurred his horse upon the crowd, and drove them back. By their increasing number, an officer of the Brunswick-Oels corps, who was riding down the street at full speed, was likewise stopped; and having a little knowledge of the English language, he learned Ronald's dilemma, and invited him to be his companion, as he was following the route of the army. They galloped through the Namur gate, and in five minutes Brussels, with its lights and din, fear and uproar, was far behind them. They were pressing at full speed along the road leading to the then obscure village of Waterloo. It wound through the dark forest of Soignies; the oak, the ash, and the elm were in full foliage, and, for many miles of the way, their deep shadows rendered the road as dreary as can be conceived.

The speed at which the travellers rode completely marred any attempt at conversation, and the only sounds which broke the silence were their horses' hoofs echoing in the green glades around them. When at intervals the moonlight streamed between the clouds and the trees, Ronald turned to survey his companion, whose singular equipment added greatly to the gloomy effect produced by the dark forest, which stretched around them for many miles in every direction.

The cavalry officer belonged to the Brunswick troops, who, with their duke, had made a vow to wear mourning until the death of their late prince and leader should be avenged. His horse, his harness, his accoutrements and uniform, were all of the deepest black, and a horse-hair plume of the same sable hue floated above the plate of his shako, which was ornamented by a large silver skull and cross-bones, similar to the badge worn by our 17th Lancers. A death's head was grinning on his sabretasche, on his holsters, his horse's forehead and breastplate, and the same grim badge looked out of every button on his coat. He was rather stately in figure for a German, and a tall and sombre-looking fellow, with large dark eyes, lank moustaches, and a solemn visage. His *tout ensemble* rendered him altogether as ghastly and melancholy a companion, as the most morbid or romantic mind could wish to ride with through a gloomy wood at midnight, with strange paths and darkness behind, and a battle-field in front.

After riding for about six miles in silence, a muttered ejaculation from both announced their observation of a flash which illuminated the sky. It was "the red artillery," and every instant other flashes shot vividly athwart the firmament, like sheet lightning; and soon afterwards the sound of firing was heard, but faint and distant. It was a dropping fire, and caused, probably, by some encounter of stragglers or outposts.

At daybreak, on approaching the village of Waterloo, they met a horse and cart, driven along the road at a rapid trot by a country boor, clad in a leathern cap and blue frock, having his shoes and garters adorned with gigantic rosettes of yellow and red tape. His car contained the bloody remains of the brave Duke of Brunswick, who at four in the evening had been mortally wounded, when heroically charging at the head of his cavalry in front of Les Quatre Bras. The hay-cart of a Flemish clodpole was now his funeral bier. The bottom was covered with the red stream, forced by the rough motion of the car from the wound, which, being in the breast, was distinctly visible, and a heavy mass of coagulated blood was plastered

around the starred bosom and laced lapels of the uniform coat. An escort of Black Brunswickers, sorrowing, sullen, and war-worn, surrounded it with their fixed bayonets. The boor cracked his whip and whistled to his horse, replacing his pipe philosophically, and apparently not caring a straw whether it was the corse of a chivalric prince or a bag of Dutch turf that his conveyance contained.

Ronald reined up his horse, and touched his bonnet in salute to the Brunswick escort; but the rage and sorrow of the cavalry officer, on beholding the lifeless body of his sovereign and leader, were such as his companion never beheld before. He muttered deep oaths and bitter execrations in German, and holding aloft his sabre, he swore that he would revenge him or perish. At least from his actions Stuart interpreted his language thus. He jerked his heavy sabre into its steel scabbard, and touching his cap as a parting salute, drove spurs into his horse, and, dashing along the forest pathway, disappeared. Ronald followed him for a little way, but finding that he was careering forward like a madman, abandoned the idea of attempting to overtake him.

Daylight was increasing rapidly, but he felt that dreamy and drowsy sensation which is always caused by want of sleep for an entire night. He endeavoured to shake off these feelings of weariness and oppression, for everything around announced that he was approaching the arena of a deadly and terrible conflict. His heart beat louder and his pulses quickened as he advanced. Dense clouds of smoke, from the contest of the preceding evening, yet mingled with the morning mist, overhung the position of Quatre Bras, and, pressed down by the heavy atmosphere, rolled over the level surface of the country. At every step he found a dead or a dying man, and crowds of wounded stragglers, officers, rank-and-file, on horse and on foot, were pouring along in pain and misery to Brussels, bedewing every part of the road with the dark crimson which trickled from their undressed wounds. These were all sufferers in the fierce contest at Quatre Bras on the preceding evening. The village of Waterloo was deserted by its inhabitants, for, like a pestilence, war spread desolation with death in its path, and the fearful Flemings had fled, scared by the roar of the distant artillery.

The wounded were unable to give any account of the engagement, save that Brunswick was slain, and the British had not yet lost the day. He was informed that his regiment was in the ninth brigade of infantry, commanded by Major-general Sir Dennis Pack; and that he would find them, with their kilted comrades the 42nd, and 44th English regiment, somewhere near the farm of Les Quatre Bras, bivouacked in a corn-field.

The speaker was an officer of the 1st regiment, or Royal Scots. He was severely wounded on the head and arm, and was making his way to Brussels on foot, bleeding and in great agony, as his scars had no other bandages than two hastily adjusted handkerchiefs. He leant for support on the arm of a soldier of the 44th, who was also suffering from a wound. The Royal Scot begged of Stuart to lend him a few shillings, adding that he had spent all his money at Brussels, and would be totally destitute when he returned thither, as he had not a farthing to procure even a mouthful of food.

Stuart gave him a few guineas, nearly all the loose change in his purse, but rendered a greater service in lending his horse, which could be of no further use to himself, as he was now close to the arena of operations. The officer mounted with many thanks, and promised to return the animal to the head-quarters of the Highlanders,—a promise which he did not live to fulfil; and the steed probably became the prey of some greedy boor of

Soignies. By his accent he knew the officer to be his countryman, and he looked back for a short time, watching him as his horse, led by the honest Yorkshireman of the 44th, threaded its way among the straggling crowd that covered the road.

There was an indescribable something in the face of this officer which seemed like part of a long forgotten dream, that some casual incident may suddenly call to remembrance. He surely had never seen him before, and yet his voice and features seemed like those of an old friend, and he felt well pleased with himself for the attention he had shown him. He inquired his name among the wounded soldiers of the Royals.

"He's Ensign Menteith of ours, sir," said one, saluting with the only hand that war had left him.

"We've many Menteiths," said another, who lay by the road-side. "Cluny is his Christian name, sir."

It was, then, his cousin, the son of Sir Colquhoun Menteith, that he had so singularly encountered and befriended. They had not met for eighteen years, since they were little children, and now beheld each other, for the last time, on the field of Waterloo. He was about to turn and make himself known, but Menteith had proceeded so far, that his figure was lost amid the crowd which accompanied him; but he hoped to meet him again,—a hope which was never realized, for he expired by the wayside, close to the entrance of the forest of Soignies. Feeling his heart saddened and softened by a thousand recollections of his childhood, which this interview had awakened, Ronald turned his face towards Quatre Bras, taking a solitary path among some thickets, to avoid the disagreeable sights of human pain and misery which he encountered on every yard of the maid road.

The morning was hazy, and everywhere dense clouds of vapour were curling upward from the earth, exhaled by the heat of the sun, which, as the day advanced, became intense, while the air was oppressive and sultry; but a great change came over the face of nature about twelve o'clock at noon.

While passing through the copsewood which bordered the highway beyond the village of Waterloo, Ronald heard the wail of a bagpipe, arising up from the woodlands, and wildly floating through the still air of the summer morning. He stopped and listened breathlessly, while the stirred blood within him mounted to his cheek. The last time he heard that instrument, it was awakening the echoes in the woods of Toulouse. But the strain was different now. It was played sadly and slowly, with all the feeling of which its wild reeds are capable; and the air was an ancient dirge from the Isle of the Mist—*Oran au Aiog*, or "the Song of Death," and Stuart's breast became filled with soft melancholy, and with wonder to hear this solemn measure of the Highland isles played in such a place, and at such a time. The cause was soon revealed.

On suddenly turning a point of the road, which was lined on each side by thick thorns and tall poplars, he beheld Æneas or Angus Macvurich, a piper of the 92nd, stalking, with the slow and stately air peculiar to his profession, before a rudely-formed waggon, in which lay a wounded officer, over whom a cloak was cast to defend him from the fierce rays of the sun. Stuart, the assistant-surgeon, rode behind, and beside it came old Dugald Mhor Cameron, with his head bare and his silver tresses floating on the wind, while he hid his face in the end of the tartan plaid. A Highland soldier led by the bridle the horse which drew the vehicle,—a rough country car of the clumsiest construction, and a wretched jolting conveyance it must have been for a man enduring the agony of a complicated gunshot wound. Anxiety and woe were depicted in every face of the

advancing group, and the Highlander who led the horse turned round every moment to look upon the sufferer in the car.

Ronald knew all the sad truth at once. On his meeting it, the cavalcade halted, the lament ceased, and a murmur of greeting arose from the Highlanders,—all except old Dugald, who stared at him with eyes of wonder and vacancy.

It was the colonel, brave Cameron, whom they were bearing away,—as many of his ancestors had been borne, from his last battle-field to his long home. He was not dead, but lay motionless on his back, pale and bloody, with his sword (rolled up in a plaid for a pillow), placed under his head. His eyes were closed, his cheeks were sunken and ghastly, and the thick curls of his brown hair were dabbled with blood and soiled with clay. Notwithstanding his familiarity with scenes of blood, Ronald could not help shrinking on beholding the leader whom he loved so dearly, and whom so many brave men had followed, stretched thus helplessly, with the hand of the grim king upon him.

"Stuart, this is a sorrowful meeting," said Ronald in a low voice, as he pressed the hand of his old friend the *medico*. "Our good and gallant colonel—"

"Aich! ay,—the cornel—the cornel—the cornel," muttered Dugald in a whimpering voice. He seemed besotted with grief. "I kent, this time yesterday, that it was to happen ere the nicht fell. The lift was blue, and the sun was bricht; but a wreath descended on my auld een, and a red cloud was before me wherever I turned,—aboon me when I looked up, and below me when I looked doon; and I kent that death was near my heart, for the power of the *taisch* was upon me. Aich! ay! Lie you there, John Cameron? Few there were like you,—few indeed!" And the old man bowed down his wrinkled face between his bare knees, and wept bitterly.

"Poor Fassifern!" whispered the surgeon; "he will never draw sword again."

"Is he mortally wounded?" asked Ronald, in the same low tone.

"Yes. Ere noon he will have departed to a better place. But in this world he has been amply avenged."

"This was spoken in a hasty whisper. The doctor's breast was too full of regret to have much room for astonishment at his suddenly meeting his brother-officer, but he inquired from whence he had now come.

"I have come on the spur from Ostend," answered Ronald, "outstripping many detachments on the march; for I have been very impatient to be with the old corps again. But this is sad news after my long absence. And what of the rest of the regiment? Have there been many casualties?"

"We have suffered severely,—lost nearly as many as at Alba de Tormes; but I know not the exact number. Return with me a few yards, and aid us in procuring a comfortable place for the colonel, and I will tell you all the regimental news in time. The corps is bivouacked in front of Les Quatre Bras, over yonder, and they will not likely get under arms for some hours yet. You can join, and report your arrival in the course of the day."

The sound of their voices caused Cameron to open his heavy eyes, and on beholding Ronald, a ray of their old fire sparkled in them. He stretched out his hand, and Ronald grasped it gently, but affectionately. Cameron attempted to speak, but his tongue failed in its office, and on his lips the half-formed words died away in faint mutterings.

As they entered the village of Waterloo, the surgeon related that, on the preceding evening, a battalion of the enemy had taken possession of a large two-storied house on the Charleroi road. From the windows and garden walls of this place they kept up an incessant fire of musketry on the British

troops in its vicinity, until Lord Wellington ordered Fassifern, with his Highlanders, to dislodge them with the bayonet.

After a sharp contest, the place was taken by storm; but Cameron, while leading the assault, was shot through the body by a bullet from a barricaded window in the upper story, fired by a chasseur, who, however, ultimately gained nothing by the exploit. The eagle eye of Cameron's revengeful follower, Dugald Mhor, had marked the slayer; and when the house was entered, and the garrison were rushing from room to room and from passage to stair, combating for death and life, he dragged him from amid the bristling bayonets of his comrades, and twice plunged his long dirk into his bosom, sending it home, till the double-edged blade protruded through his goat-skin knapsack behind; and the Highlanders were so infuriated by the loss of their leader, that butt and bayonet were used freely, until scarcely a man was left alive in the place.

"Nae quarter! Remember the colonel! Death an' dule to every man o' them!" were cries with which they encouraged each other during the conflict.

The best house in Waterloo being selected, the colonel was borne into it, and placed in an apartment, which seemed to be a sort of parlour, facing the Brussels road. It was a snug little cottage, with walls of bright red brick, a thatched roof, and yellow door and shutters, with red panels. Numerous arbours and rails of trellis-work, painted green and white, encircled it; and a forest of tall hollyhocks, peonies, roses, and other large and glaring flowers, were blooming about it, and glistening gaily in the meridian sun; while gorgeous tulips and anemones were waving in thousands from plots and parterres, arrayed in all the summer glory of a Dutch garden. But these were miserably trod down, as the Highlanders bore the colonel up the narrow pebbled walk to the door, which being locked, was opened by the rough application of a stone from the highway. The inmates had fled, and the mansion was empty.

The colonel was laid upon the floor,—there was not a bed in the place, all the furniture having been carried off. His sorrowing old follower knelt down on his bare knees beside him, supporting his head, while he poured forth interjections and prayers in Gaelic.

"I can do nothing more for his wound; it is already dressed," whispered the surgeon to Ronald, who was eager to perform some office by which he might serve the invalid, or assuage some of his torments; but nothing could be done, and he was compelled to stand by, an idle spectator, while the brave spirit of his friend hovered between life and eternity. "He is sinking fast," continued the doctor in the same whispering voice. "Alas! the regiment will never see his like again."

"Where is Angus Macvurich?" asked the colonel in a low voice, but a firm one, and as if all his energies were returning.

The piper answered by a loud snifter, or half-stifled sob.

"Oich! he's speakin' like himsel again. Ye'll no dee just this time,—will ye, no? O say ye'll no!" said old Dugald, bending over him in an agony of sorrow, and gazing on his face as a father would have done. "We'll baith gang hame,—ay, gang hame thegithir yet to Fassifern, among the green hills of the bonnie north country. Ochone! woe to the day we ever left it,—woe!".

"No, Dugald, my good, my dear old man; I shall never behold the fair Highland hills again. My hour is come, and death is creeping into my heart, slowly but surely. Oh, that I might die among my kindred! It is a sad and desolate feeling to know that one must be buried in a distant land, and unheeding strangers will tread on the place of our repose. 'Tis sad to die here, and to find a grave so far away from home, from the land

of the long yellow broom and the purple heather. Tell me, gentlemen, did my Highlanders storm the house on the Charleroi road?"

"Ay, please your honour," said the piper, "an' sticket every man they fand below the riggin o't."

"Those excepted who laid down their arms," added the surgeon. "But the house was gallantly stormed, colonel."

"Well done the Gael! Well done, my good and brave soldiers!" cried the invalid.

There was a long pause, which nothing broke, save the loud breathing of the wounded Highlander, until, in feeble accents, he said,

"Come near me, Macvurich; I would hear the blast of the pipe once more ere I die. Play the ancient death-song of the Skye men; my forefathers have often heard it without shrinking."

"*Oran au Aiog?*" said the piper, raising his drones.

The colonel moved his hand, and Macvurich began to screw the pipes and sound a prelude on the reeds, whose notes, even in this harsh and discordant way, caused the eyes of the Highlander to flash and glare, as it roused the fierce northern spirit in his bosom.

"He ordered that strange old tune to be played from the first moment I declared his wound to be mortal," said the surgeon in a low voice. "It is one of the saddest and wildest I ever heard."

"Hold me up, Dugald; I would say something," muttered Cameron. "Ah! Stuart—I mean Ronald Stuart, I have much to say and to ask you; but my voice fails me, and my tongue falters,—and—and—" utterance failed him for a moment. "But tell me, gentlemen, what news from the front? Alas! I should have asked that before. But tell me, while I can hear your voices,—have the enemy been defeated?"

"They have been driven from the position at Les Quatre Bras," replied Doctor Stuart; "our troops are everywhere victorious."

"Then Cameron can die in happiness," said he firmly, as he sunk back. "Oh! I hope my dear country will think that I have served her faithfully!"*

His lips quivered as if twitched by a spasm, and he muttered some imaginary order to keep shoulder to shoulder, to prepare to charge; and, drooping his head upon the shoulder of Dugald Mhor, he expired at about one o'clock in the afternoon.

A cry of agony, sharp and shrill, like that of a girl rather than of an old man of eighty, burst from the lips of Dugald, who bent his wrinkled and sun-burnt visage over the face of the colonel until he touched it; and he wept and sobbed bitterly, uttering uncouth ejaculations, and saying strange things, such as only an aged Highlander (whose mind was filled with all the deep impressions of mountain manners and past ages) would have said.

Anon he drew himself up erect, cast his disordered plaid about his towering figure, and gazed around him with eyes in which there gleamed a strange light und unsettled expression. He seemed the very *beau ideal* of a Gaelic seer; and Macvurich, who imagined that he beheld some dark vision of the second sight, drew back with respect and awe, not unmingled with a slight degree of fear.

What wild vision crossed the disordered brain of the aged vassal I know not, but he tossed his arms towards it, and a torrent of blood gushed forth from his mouth and nostrils; he tottered towards the corse of Cameron, and sunk on the floor beside it, a dying man. Ronald sprang forward and

* These were his dying words. In recompense for his great services, a baronetcy was granted to his family. In 1815, his aged father received the title of Sir Evan Cameron, Bart., of Fassifern.

lifted him up, but he never spoke again, and expired, making several ineffectual signs to Macvurich to play; but the piper was kneeling on the floor near the corse of his leader, and beheld them not.

Angus Macvurich was a stern old Highlander from Brae-Mar, browned with the sun of Egypt and the Peninsula. He had gained scars in Denmark, Holland, France, Spain, and Portugal. Since Cameron had joined the regiment as a young ensign, they had served together, and he had seen blood enough shed to harden his heart; but now he was kneeling down near the dead body, covering his brown face with his hands, to conceal tears,—of which, perhaps, he felt ashamed. The memory of days long passed away—of some old acts of kindness, or of his colonel's worth, were crowding thick and full upon his mind, and the veteran was weeping like a girl.

Stuart was deeply moved with this scene of death and woe. Not having been in the action, his heart had not been roused, or its fibres strung to that pitch of callousness or excitement requisite to enable one to look coolly on such scenes. He shrouded the remains of Cameron in the ample plaid of his faithful and departed follower, and, after covering them decently but hastily up, he prepared to retire. Yet, ere he went, he returned again to lift the tartan screen, and

> "To gaze once more on that commanding clay,
> Which for the last, but not the first, time bled."

His breast became heated, and he felt strange vindictive longings for battle and revenge, such as are seldom felt until one has been engaged for at least half an hour. Desiring Macvurich to remain by the bodies until they could be prepared for interment, he quitted the cottage, and, accompanied by his namesake the surgeon, set out on the way to the bivouacs of the army.

Each was occupied with his own sad reflections on the scene they had just witnessed, and they walked forward for some time in silence. After awhile, Stuart recapitulated his adventures and the story of his disappearance, which afforded ample scope for conversation until they drew near Quatre Bras, when the miserable objects they encountered at every step rendered it impossible to converse longer with ease or pleasure. The whole road was covered and blocked up with the unfortunate wounded travelling towards Brussels, some in the waggons of the Train, hundreds on foot, and hundreds crawling along the earth, covered with dust and blood, dragging their miserable bodies past like crushed worms; while their cries and ejaculations to God for mercy, and to man for aid and for water, formed a horrible medley, surpassing the power of description.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE 17TH JUNE, 1815.

"THAT is Quatre Bras," said the surgeon, pointing to a little village close at hand. "The Highlanders are in bivouac behind it;" and, adding that his services were now required in another direction, the military Esculapius rode off, while Ronald walked hastily forward to the village.

On nearing the spot where the regiment was in position, a strange-looking little hut, composed of turf and the boughs of trees, apparently hastily reared up by the wayside, attracted his attention. Curiosity prompted him to enter this wig-wam by pushing open the door, which consisted of nothing more than a large oaken branch, torn from the neigh-

bouring forest. An officer clad in a blue surtout, white pantaloons, Hessian boots tasselled and spurred, and wearing around his neck a *white cravat* or neckcloth, started up from the examination of a large map of Flanders, over which he had been bending, and raising his cocked hat, bent his keen bright eye on the intruder with a stern and inquiring expression of anger and surprise. To use a Scotticism—Stuart was *dumbfoundered* to find that he had interrupted the cogitations and anxious deliberations of Wellington.

He muttered something—he knew not what—by way of apology, and withdrew as abruptly as he had entered, with the unpleasant consciousness that he must have looked very foolish.

On gaining the rear of the village, and approaching the Highlanders, he found them forming under arms, while the pipers, strutting to and fro on the highway, made all Quatre Bras and the Bois de Bossu ring to the "gathering of the Gordons." The regiment was formed in line behind a thick garden hedge, favoured by which he was enabled to advance close upon them unseen; and the astonishment of the officers and soldiers may be imagined, when, by leaping over the barrier, he appeared suddenly among them. A half-stifled exclamation ran along the line, and there was a pause in the ceremonious formation of the parade.

The officers clustered round him, and many of the soldiers, pressing in with a forwardness which was easily forgiven, greeted him in their "hamely Scots tongue," but with an affection, joy, and earnestness which he never forgot. Campbell, who now commanded the regiment, leaped from his horse, and with his ample hand grasped Stuart's so tightly as to give him some pain. One seldom shakes the hand of such a Celtic giant.

"Well, Ronald, my lad! this is astonishing—almost beyond belief. Do we look upon you, or your wraith?"

"Myself, major, myself I hope—sound, wind and limb," answered Stuart laughing.

"I thought wraiths were not in fashion, in this flat country at least. Faith! this has quite the air of a romance, with the accompaniments of astonishment, mystery, and all that sort of thing. Did you come down from the clouds? or spring out of the earth like a Shetland dwarf?"

"Queer modes, both, of joining a regiment. No, major; I just leaped the hedge,—unromantically enough. But, how d'ye do, Chisholm? How are you, Macildhui? Ah! Douglas, my boy! and Lisle! Dear Louis, how much I have to ask and to tell! Your hand."

And thus he greeted them all in succession, from the pot-bellied field-officer to the slender ensign, raw from the college or nursery. A truly national shaking of hands ensued, and such, I may safely assert, as Quatre Bras had never witnessed before. Then came the light company, with their humble but hearty wishes of joy; and the whole regiment, giving martial discipline to the winds, cheered and waved their bonnets, while the pipers blew as if their lives depended on it, until Wellington, confounded by the uproar which had so suddenly broken forth in his immediate vicinity, was seen looking from his wigwam in no pleasant mood; but not even the appearance of that portentous *white cravat*,—the glories of which are still sung by the Spanish muleteer, the Flemish boatman, and the Portuguese gipsy,—could still the clamour.

Although Ronald's letters written from London had informed his military friends of his existence and safe arrival in England, they were by no means prepared for his sudden appearance among them in Flanders, and he had to endure a thick cross-fire of questions and eager inquiries, which at that moment there was not time to answer; but he promised the rehearsal of his story at full length on the first opportunity, and for the

present considerably repressed their joy by announcing the death of Cameron, and of his follower, poor old Dugald, who had been a man of no small dignity and importance among those who filled the ranks of the Gordon Highlanders.

The troops had been ordered to fall back upon the position of Waterloo, which was next day to be the scene of that "king-making victory,"—the most important ever fought and won in Europe, and one which has fixed for ever the fame of the great duke and the British army.

When the bustle created by his arrival had a little subsided, Ronald requested a few words apart with Louis; but before he could speak, the voice of Campbell was heard in command.

"Fall in, gentlemen; fall in!"

"Alice?" whispered Stuart.

"She is well and happy, Ronald; and never once has her love wandered from *you*," said Louis, pressing his hand.

The bugle sounded, and they separated to join their respective companies; and next moment the adjutant was flying along the line at full gallop, to collect the reports. Then riding up to Campbell, he lowered the point of his sword, and, acquainting him with the casualties, returned to his post in the line, while the regiment broke into open column of sections, with the right in front; and the pioneers, with their saws, axes, &c., and their leather aprons strapped to their bare knees, went off double-quick in advance. "Quick march!" was now the order repeated by a hundred commanding officers, varying in cadence and distance. The trumpet brayed, the cymbal clashed, the drum rebounded, the war-pipe yelled forth its notes of defiance and pride, and the whole army was in motion *en route* for Waterloo.

By the suddenness of the order to "fall in," Stuart lost an opportunity (which never again occurred) of learning from Louis,—that of which he was still ignorant,—the wreck of his father's affairs, and his emigration to a strange country.

Gloom and doubt were apparent in the faces of both officers and privates, as the army began its march to the rear, upon Waterloo. Anything like retreating is so unusual to British troops, that a chill seemed to have fallen on every heart as they moved from Quatre Bras, before which the third and fifth divisions were left to cover the rear,—or at least to deceive Napoleon by remaining in sight till the artillery and the main body of the army were far on the Waterloo road. As Lord Wellington had foreseen, Napoleon was long kept in ignorance of our retreat by this measure; but as soon as he perceived it, he despatched immense bodies of cavalry to press and harass the rear-guard. On looking back, just before the *Bois de Soignies* began to throw its foliage over the line of march, Stuart saw several dashing charges made by the British heavy dragoons, who rode right through and through the massive columns of the enemy, breaking their order, sabring them in hundreds, and compelling the rest to recoil, and repress the fierce feeling of triumph with which they beheld the British army retreating before them. Scarcely a shot was fired, as the carbines and pistols were rarely resorted to. Their conflicts were all maintained with the sword, and some thousand blades were seen flashing at once in the light of the sun, as they were whirled aloft like gleams of lightning, and descended like flashes of fire on the polished helmets of the French, and on the tall and varied caps of the British cavalry.

During the greater part of this march, Ronald moved with a group of the officers about him, listening to that which he was heartily tired of relating, —"a full, true, and particular history" of his detention among the Spaniards, his release and his restoration to the regiment. The men of the

neighbouring sections, who were all listening attentively with eager ears, circulated the story through the ranks with various additions and alterations, to suit that taste for the marvellous and wonderful which exists so much among soldiers—Highlanders especially; so that by the time it had travelled along the line of march, from the mouths of the light company to the grenadiers at the head of the column, Ronald's narrative might have vied with that true history, the "Life of Prince Arthur," "Jack the Giant Queller," or any other hero of ancient times.

"Well, Stuart, my man!" said Campbell, riding up to Ronald; "I am happy to see you again at the head of the light bobs."

"I thank you, major; but truly none can rejoice more than myself," answered Ronald. "Faith! a century seems to have elapsed since I saw the old colours with the silver thistles and the sphinxes,—your favourite badge, major, waving above the blue bonnets. There was a time, when I thought never to have beheld them again."

"When you so narrowly escaped hanging by those rascally thieves, I suppose? Don Alvaro gave you ample reparation, as far as he could do, by drawing fifty human necks, like the thraws of so many muir-hens. A fine fellow, that Alvaro! only rather lank and sombre in visage. Faith! I shall never forget the supper his pretty sister gave us the first night we halted at Merida. Every dish had garlic, olive oil, and onions in it!"

"Hooch, deevils and warlocks!" said Serjeant Macrone, grasping the truncheon of his pike. "Oh! had I peen there peside you, sir, whan thae reiver loons spake o' a tow to you, many a sair croon wad hae peen among them!"

"I'm much obliged to you, Macrone; but, with a dozen of our blue bonnets, I would soon have made a clear house of them."

"Oich!" continued the serjeant, growing eloquent in his indignation, "it wad hae peen a fera tammed unpleasant thing to pe hanget, especially an officer and shentleman. But wad the reivers no hae shot yer honour, kindly and discreetly, just if ye had asked them as a favour, ye ken?"

"I never thought of that, Macrone," replied Ronald, laughing heartily; "both modes were equally unpleasant, though not equally honourable."

"Poor Cameron! and so we have lost him at last," observed Campbell, in a half-musing tone, while his eyes glistened. "I often look at the head of the column, and half imagine I see him riding along there, on his tall black horse, as of old; his figure erect and stately, and his long feathers drooping down on his right shoulder. Many a day I have watched him with pleasure, as he led the line of march over the long plains of Spain, when we have been moving from sunrise to sunset, *on* the tall spire of some distant city. I shall obtain the command, but He who reads the human heart knows that I would rather have remained always major, that Cameron might have lived."

"Brave Fassifern! we were always proud of him, but more so now than ever," said Stuart, and his eyes glittered with enthusiasm while he spoke. "'Tis but two hours since I beheld him expire in Waterloo yonder."

"That d—ned old house near Quatre Bras!" exclaimed Campbell; "I am sorry we left one stone of it standing on another. Poor Fassifern felt at the head of the grenadiers, while assaulting it in front. I carried it in rear, beating down the back door with my own hand, and scarcely a man was left alive in it. Our men fought like furies after the colonel fell. Ay," he continued, emphatically, "John Cameron was a true Highland gentleman, and possessed the heart of a hero."

"Och!" muttered Macrone, "he was a pretty man, and a prave man, and nefer flinched in ta front o' the enemy."

"And never did one of his name, Duncan," whispered a comrade, in Gaelic. "I myself am a Cameron—"

"Ha, major! what is that?" asked Ronald, as something like a distant discharge of artillery sounded through the hot and still atmosphere. "Can the Prussians be at it again?"

"We shall hear no more of the Prussians, after what befell them at Ligny yesterday. 'Tis said that they have lost twenty thousand men; and old Blucher himself narrowly escaped being trodden to death by the French cavalry charging over him, as he lay unhorsed and wounded on the ground. They repassed him in retreat, but the old fox lay close. These is the sound again!"

"What the devil can it be?" said an officer.

"The French flying artillery must have come up with our rear guard."

"No, no, Ronald; look at the sky, man! We shall have a tremendous storm in five minutes."

While he spoke, the sky, which had been bright and sunny, became suddenly darkened by masses of murky clouds, the flying shadows of which were seen moving over the wide corn-fields and green woodlands. Scudding and gathering, these gloomy precursors of a storm came hurrying across the sky, until they closed over every part of it, obscuring the face of heaven, and rendering the earth dark as when viewed by the grey light of a winter day at three o'clock, and the spirits of the retreating soldiers became more saddened and depressed as the black shadows of the forest of Soignies deepened around them. Red, blue, and yellow streaks of lightning, vivid and hot, flashed across the whole sky, lighting it up like a fiery dome from the eastern to the western horizon, and the stunning peals of thunder roared every instant as if to rend the world asunder. Rain and hail descended in torrents, while the tempests of wind, which arose in angry gusts, tore through the forest of Soignies like the spirit of destruction, scattering leaves, branches, trees, and the affrighted birds in every direction. Oh! the miseries of the 17th of June! The oldest soldiers in the army declared that the storm of that day surpassed anything they had ever suffered or beheld.

The whole army, from the front to the rear-guard, were drenched to the skin. The roads, in some places, were flooded with water, till they looked like winding canals, with their surface broken into countless wrinkles by the splashing rain; in other places the mud was so deep, that the soldiers, loaded with their heavy accoutrements, sank above the ankles at every step, and the weight of the thick clay which adhered to their feet, added greatly to their misery. Hundreds of these in the Highland regiments lost their shoes on withdrawing their feet from the soil, and as no time was given to take others from their knapsacks, if they had any there, they were obliged to tread out the rest of the march in their red-striped hose. Many of the officers wore their thin-soled dress boots, their white kid gloves, &c., having been suddenly summoned to the field from the gaiety of the ball at Brussels, and some were almost barefooted before the order was given to halt. Their boots, of French kid, wore away like brown paper in the mud and rain.

Without tents or any covering, save their great-coats or cloaks, the troops passed the miserable night of the 17th June in bivouac,—exposed, unsheltered, to all the fury of the storm, which lasted until eight o'clock next morning. For nearly four-and-twenty hours the wind had blown and the rain fallen without intermission.

Though their spirits were considerably depressed, the officers and their soldiers bore all with that perfect patience and endurance, which the British army possesses in a greater degree than any other in Europe. They can

bear stoically alike the fury of the elements, and the exasperating insults of a petulant mob.

Not a murmur of discontent was heard that night in the British bivouac; no man repined, as the utmost confidence and reliance were placed in the great leader, under whom, on the morrow, they were to engage in such a struggle as the world has rarely witnessed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE 18TH OF JUNE.

About eight o'clock on the morning of the 18th the storm suddenly abated, the rain ceased, the wind died away, the grey clouds began to disperse, and the sun broke forth in his glory. His warm glow was delightful after the chill of such a tempestuous night; and the wan faces of the soldiers brightened as they watched the dispersion of the vapoury masses, and beheld the morning sky assuming a pure and serene blue. Alas! it was a morning sun which thousands were doomed never to behold setting at eve.

Immense masses of white mist were rising on all sides,—from the green woodlands of the Bois de Soignies,—from the swamps, the fields, and the puddles formed in the night; and as the vapour became exhaled, and floated away to mingle with the clouds, the grass grew more green, and the fields of flattened corn rose, and waved their yellow harvest to and fro in the morning breeze. Fires were lighted by the soldiers, to dry their clothes and cook a ration of beef, which had been hastily supplied to some corps of the army. An allowance of grog was also served out by the commissariat to every man, without distinction. It was swallowed gladly and thankfully, and the former cheerfulness of the troops began to revive, and they became as merry as men could be who had marched so far, passed such a night, and had yet their shirts sticking to their backs.

This was the morning of the eventful 18th of June, 1815.

Sir Dennis Pack's brigade had scarcely finished their wretched meal of beef, broiled on bayonets and ramrods amid the smoky embers of green wood, before the pipers of the Royal Highlanders, who were bivouacked on the right, were heard blowing their regimental gathering with might and main, summoning the old *Black Watch* to battle.

"Stand to your arms! The enemy are coming on!" was the cry on every side; and aides-de-camp, majors of brigade, and other officers were seen galloping in every direction, clearing hedge and wall at the risk of their necks. The trumpets of the cavalry, the drums and bugles of the infantry, were soon heard sounding in concert over every part of the position, as the army got under arms to meet their old hereditary foe.

"*Vive l'Empereur!*" A hundred thousand soldiers,—brave men as France ever sent forth, loaded the morning wind with the cry; and the hum of their voices, sounding from afar over the level country, was heard—like the low roar of a distant sea—murmuring and chafing, long before they came within range of musket-shot.

The soldiers of the allied army stood to their arms with their usual willingness and alacrity, but with that degree of gravity and calmness which always pervades a body of men before an engagement. It is a serious reflection that one may be in eternity in five minutes, and one feels rather sedate in consequence,—till the blood is up, and the true British mettle fairly roused. A battle was about to be fought, and that it would be a bloody one was evident; for it was between two splendid armies, equal in

arms, in discipline, and in courage, and led by two of the greatest generals the world ever produced. But it is not my intention to recount a history of the battle of Waterloo. Generally, I will confine myself to the motions of the 9th brigade, commanded by the brave Sir Dennis Pack.

It consisted of four regiments,—namely, the third battalion of the 1st Royal Scots, the 42nd or Royal Highlanders, the second battalion of the 44th or East Essex regiment, and the 92nd or Gordon Highlanders, with whom, I trust, the reader is tolerably well acquainted. The fighting at Quatre Bras on the 16th had considerably thinned their ranks, but they yet mustered five hundred bayonets.

Aides-de-camp, general and other staff-officers, were seen galloping on the spur over banks and ditches, through copse-wood and corn-fields, bearing orders, instructions, and hasty despatches to those commanding corps and brigades; the cavalry looked to their girths and bridles, the infantry to their locks and pouches; the artillery-guns, tumbrils, and *caissons* were dragged at full gallop among ripe fields of wheat and barley, through hedges and slough ditches, with matches smoking, the gunners on the boxes, the drivers on the saddle, rammers and sponges rattling and clanking, and the cavalry escort galloping in front and rear. Bustle and noise, but with perfect steadiness and coolness, prevailed, as the army of Lord Wellington formed in position on that memorable field, and awaited the approach of their enemy, who came on flushed with the success of the recent battle of Ligny.

"There goes Buonaparte!" cried Ronald to his friend Louis Lisle, who at that moment came up to him.

"There goes Napoleon! the Emperor and all his staff!" burst from many a tongue.

The whole attention of the British line was attracted by the appearance of Buonaparte, who rode along the ridge occupied by the French army. He wore his great-coat unbuttoned, and thrown back to display his epaulets and green uniform, and had on his head the little cocked hat by which all statues of him are so well known. A staff, brilliant and numerous, composed of officers wearing a hundred different uniforms, followed him, but at the distance of seventy or eighty paces, riding like a confused mob of cavalry. He passed rapidly along the French line towards La Belle Alliance; but the fire of a few twelve-pound field-pieces, which had been brought to bear upon his person, compelled him to retire to the rear.

The right of the allied army rested on Braine la Leude, the left on the farm of Ter la Haye, and the centre on Mont St. Jean, thus extending along a ridge from which the ground descended gently to a sort of vale; on the other side of which, at the distance of about twelve hundred yards from the allies, the long-extended lines of the French army were formed in battle array, with eagles glittering, colours waving, and bayonets gleaming above the dark battalions of infantry.

The celebrated château of Hougoumont was in front of the right centre of the allies; the woods, the orchard, and the house were full of troops. Arms glanced at every window, bayonets bristled everywhere around it, and the tall grenadier-caps of the Coldstream Guards, and the shakoes of the Belgians and Brunswickers, were visible above the green hedges of the garden, and the parapet walls which enclosed the park and orchard. The farm-house of La Haye Sainte, on the Charleroi road at the foot of the eminence, had also been converted into a garrison, loop-holed and barricaded, with brass-muzzled field-pieces peeping through the honeysuckle and the rails of the garden around it.

All around the spot where these dire preparations had been made, the land was in a beautiful state of cultivation, and the bright yellow corn

waved ripe in every field; but the passage of cavalry, brigades of artillery, and sometimes dense masses of infantry in close column of companies or sub-divisions of five-and-twenty men abreast, the continual deploying on point and pivot as new alignements were taken up, made sad havoc among the hopes of the husbandman and farmer.

The Belgian and Hanoverian battalions were checkered as equally as possible with the British, and thus many different uniforms varied the long perspective of the allied line; while the French army presented one long array of dark uniforms, blue, green, or the grey great-coat, an upper garment worn almost invariably, in all weathers, by the French troops when on service.

Near a tree, which grew on a bank above the Charleroi road, and which formed, or denoted, the very centre of the British position, Lord Wellington could be seen sitting motionless on horseback, observing, with his acute and practised eye, the motions of his mighty antagonist. His cavalry were, generally, posted in rear of the right, the centre, and left of the position, the artillery behind a hedge on a ridge which rises near Ter la Haye; and this screen of foliage concealed them from the enemy, who commenced the battle about half-past eleven o'clock.

A movement was seen taking place among the French, and in a few minutes the division commanded by Jerome Buonaparte attacked the château of Hougoumont. As they advanced upon it, Lord Wellington's artillery opened on them, and did considerable execution; but they pressed heedlessly on and assaulted the ancient château, which was resolutely defended, and soon became shrouded in a cloud of smoke as the volleying musketry blazed away from hedge and wall, barricade and window. Every bullet bore the fate of a human being; the French were strewed in heaps, and the château, into which they showered grape and musketry with unsparing diligence, seemed not likely to surrender soon. The foreign troops gave way, but the brave Guards maintained the defence of the house and garden *alone*, and with the unflinching determination and courage of British soldiers.

Under cover of a formidable cannonade, which Napoleon's artillery opened from the crest of the ridge where his line was formed, three dense masses of infantry, consisting each of four battalions, moving in solid squares, poured impetuously down on the left and centre of the allied line. They rent the air with cries of "*Vive la France! Vive l'Empereur!*" and on they came double-quick, with their sloped arms glittering in the sun. They were enthusiastically encouraged by their officers, whose voices were heard above even the mingled din of the battle-cry, cheering them on as they waved their eagles and brandished their sabres aloft. One of these columns poured its strength on La Haye Sainte, where it experienced a warm and deadly welcome; while the other two attacked that part of the position which was occupied by Sir Dennis Pack's brigade.

As they advanced, Campbell made a signal with his sword, and the eight pipes of the regiment commenced the wild pibroch of Donald-dhu,—the march of the Islesmen to Lochaber in 1431. It was echoed back by the pipes of the Royals and 42nd on the right, and the well-known effect of that instrument was instantly visible in the flushing cheeks of the brigade. Its music never falls in vain on the ear of a Scotsman, for he alone can understand its wild melody and stirring associations. The ranks, which before had exhibited all that stillness and gravity which troops always observe—in fact, which their feelings compel them to observe—before being engaged, for fighting is a serious matter, became animated, and the soldiers began to cheer and handle their muskets long before the order was given to fire. A brigade of Belgians, formed in line before a hedge, was

attached furiously by the French columns, who were eager for vengeance on these troops, whom they considered as deserters from the cause of the "great Emperor," whose uniform they still wore. The impetuosity of the attack compelled the Belgians to retire in rear of the hedge, over which they received and returned a spirited fire.

Pack's brigade now opened upon the foe, and the roar of cannon and musketry increased on every side as the battle became general along the extended parallel lines of the British and French. The fire of the latter on Pack's brigade was hot and rapid, for in numerical force they outnumbered them, many to one, and made dreadful havoc. The men were falling—to use the common phrase—in heaps, and the danger, smoke, uproar, and slaughter, with all the terrible concomitants of a great battle, increased on every side; the blood of the combatants grew hotter, and their national feelings of hatred and hostility, which previously had lain dormant, were now fully awakened, and increased apace with the slaughter around them. Many of the Highlanders seemed animated by a perfect fury,—a terrible eagerness to grapple with their antagonists. Captain Grant, an officer of the Gordon Highlanders, became so much excited, that he quitted the ranks, and rushing to the front, brandished his long broad sword aloft, and defied the enemy to charge or approach further. Then, calling upon the regiment to follow him, he threw up his bonnet, and flinging himself headlong on the bayonets of the enemy was instantly slain. Poor fellow! he left a young wife at home to lament him, and his loss was much regretted by the regiment.

"This is hot work, Chisholm," said Ronald with a grim smile to his smart young sub, who came towards him jerking his head about in that nervous manner which the eternal whistling of musket-shot will cause many a brave fellow to assume.

"Hot work,—devilish!" answered the other with a blunt carelessness, which, perhaps, was half affected. "But I have something good to communicate."

"What?"

"Blucher, with forty thousand Prussians, is advancing from Wavre. Bony knows nothing of this, and the first news he hears of it will be the twelve-pounders of the Prussians administering a dose of cold iron to his left flank, upon the extremity of the ridge yonder."

"Good! but is the intelligence true?"

"Ay, true as the Gospel. I heard an aide-de-camp, a rather excited but exquisite young fellow of the 7th Hussars, tell old Sir Dennis so this moment."

"Would to God we saw them!—the Prussians I mean. We are suffering dreadfully from the fire of these columns."

"Ay, faith!" replied the other, coolly adjusting his bonnet, which a ball had knocked awry, and turning towards the left flank of the company, before he had gone three paces, he was stretched prostrate on the turf.

He never stirred again. A ball had pierced his heart; and the bonnet, which a moment before he had arranged so jauntily over his fair hair, rolled to the feet of Ronald Stuart.

"I kent he was *fey!* Puir young gentleman!" said a soldier.

"I will add a stone to his cairn," observed another, figuratively; "and give this to revenge him," he added, dropping upon his knee and firing among the smoke of the opposite line.

Stuart would have examined the body of his friend, to find if any spark of life yet lingered in it, but his attention was attracted by other matters.

The Belgians at the hedge gave way, after receiving and returning a most destructive fire for nearly an hour. The 3rd battalion of the Scots Royals,

and a battalion of the 44th (the same regiment which lately distinguished itself at Cabul), took up the ground of the vanquished men of *Gallia Belgica*, and after maintaining the same conflict against an overwhelming majority of numbers, and keeping stanch to their post till the unlucky hedge was piled breast high with killed and wounded, they were compelled also to retire, leaving it in possession of the enemy, who seized upon it with a fierce shout of triumph, as if it had been the fallen capital of a conquered country, instead of the rural boundary of a field of rye.

It was now three o'clock in the afternoon. The strife had lasted incessantly for four hours, and no word was yet heard of the Prussians. For miles around the plains were involved in smoke; and whether they were approaching or not no man knew, for a thick war-cloud enshrouded the vale of Waterloo. Three thousand of the allies had been put to the rout, and the dense mob-like columns of the enemy came rolling on from the ridge opposite to Lord Wellington's position, apparently with the determination of bearing all before them.

When they gained possession of the hedge before mentioned, Sir Dennis Pack, who had been with its defenders till the moment they gave way, galloped at full speed up to the Gordon Highlanders,—a corps reduced now to a mere skeleton, and barely mustering two hundred efficient bayonets.

"Highlanders!" cried the general, who was evidently labouring under no ordinary degree of excitement and anxiety, "you must charge! Upon them with the bayonet, or the heights are lost, for all the troops in your front have given way!"

"Highlandmen! shoulder to shoulder," cried Campbell, as the regiment began to advance with their muskets at the long trail, and in silence, with clenched teeth and bent brows, for their hearts were burning to avenge the fall of their comrades. "Shoulder to shoulder, lads! close together, like a wall!" continued the major, as, spurring his horse to the front, he waved his sword and bonnet aloft, and the corps moved down the hill. "Remember Egypt and Corunna,—and remember Cameron, though he's gone, for his eye may be upon us yet at this very moment! Forward—double quick!"

The column they were about to charge presented a front more than equal to their own on *four* faces, and formed a dense mass of three thousand infantry. Heedless of their numbers, with that free and fearless impetuosity which they have ever displayed, and which has always been attended with the most signal success, the bonneted clansmen rushed on with the fury of a torrent from their native hills, equally regardless of the charged bayonets of the French front ranks, the murderous fire of the rear, and of ten pieces of cannon sent by Napoleon to assist in gaining the height occupied by Pack's shattered brigade.

It was a desperate crisis, and the regiment knew that they must be victorious or be annihilated.

A body of cuirassiers were coming on to the assistance of the vast mass of infantry,—all splendid troops, glittering in a panoply of brass and steel; and the slanting rays of the sun gleamed beautifully on their long lines of polished helms and corselets, and the forest of swords, which they brandished aloft above the curls of eddying smoke, as they came sweeping over the level plain at full gallop. The advance of the little band of Highlanders made them seem like a few mice attacking a lion,—the very acme of madness or of courage. Their comrades were all defeated, themselves were threatened by cavalry, galled by ten pieces of cannon, and opposed to three thousand infantry; and yet they went on with the heedless impetuosity of the heroes of Killiecrankie, Falkirk, and Gladsmuir.

The front rank of the enemy's column remained with their long muskets and bayonets at the charge, while the rear kept up a hot and destructive fire, in unison with the sweeping discharges from the field-pieces placed at a little distance on their flanks.

The moment was indeed a critical one to these two hundred eagle hearts. They were in the proportion of one man to fifteen; and notwithstanding this overwhelming majority, when the steady line of the Highlanders came rushing on, with their bayonets levelled before them, and had reached within a few yards of the enemy, the latter turned and fled! The huge mass, which might with ease have eaten them, broke away in a confusion almost laughable, the front ranks overthrowing the rear, and every man tossing away musket, knapsack, and accoutrements. The Highlanders still continued pressing forward with the charged bayonet, yet totally unable to comprehend what had stricken the foe with so disgraceful a panic.

"Halt!" cried Campbell. "Fire on the cowards. D—n them, give them a volley!" and a hasty fire was poured upon the confused mob.

A cry arose of "Here come the cavalry!"

"Hoigh! hurrah!" cried the Highlanders. "The Greys—the Greys—the Scots Greys! Hoigh! our ain folk—hurrah!" And a tremendous cheer burst from the little band as they beheld, emerging from the wreaths of smoke, the squadrons of their countrymen, who came thundering over the corpse-strewed field, where drums, colours, arms, cannon, and cannot-shot, killed and wounded men, covered every foot of ground.

The grey horses—"those beautiful grey horses," as the anxious Napoleon called them, while watching this movement through his glass—came on, snorting and prancing, with dilated nostrils and eyes of fire, exhibiting all the pride of our superb dragoon chargers, while the long broad-swords and tall bear-skin caps of the riders were seen towering above the battle-clouds which rolled along the surface of the plain.

They formed part of the heavy brigade of the gallant Sir William Ponsonby, who, sabre in hand, led them on, with the First Royal English Dragoons, and the Sixth, who came roaring tremendously, and shouting strange things in the deep brogue of merry "ould Ireland."

From the weight of the men, the mettle of their horses, and their fine equipment, a charge of British cavalry is a splendid sight: I say British, for our own are the finest-looking as well as the best troops in the world, —an assertion which few can dispute when we speak of Waterloo. Those who witnessed the charge of Ponsonby's brigade will never forget it. The Highlanders halted, and the dragoons swept on past their flank, towards the confused masses of the enemy. The Greys, on passing the little band of their countrymen, sent up the well-known cry of "Scotland for ever!"

"Scotland for ever!" At such a moment, this was indeed a cry that roused "the stirring memory of a thousand years." It touched a chord in every Scottish heart. It seemed like a voice from their home—from the tongues of those they had left behind, and served to stimulate them to fresh exertions in honour of the land of the rock and the eagle.

"Cheer, my blue-bonnets!" cried Campbell, leaping in his saddle in perfect ecstasy. "Oh! the gallant fellows! how bravely they ride. God and victory be with them this day!"

"Scotland for ever!" echoed the Highlanders, as they waved their black plumage on the gale. The Royals, the 42nd, the Cameron Highlanders, and every Scots regiment within hearing, took up the battle-cry and tossed it to the wind; and even the feeble voices of the wounded were added to the general shout while the chivalrous Greys plunged into the column of the enemy, sabring them in scores, and riding them down like a field of

corn. The cries of the panic-stricken French were appalling; they were like the last despairing shrieks of drowning men, rather than the clamour of men-at-arms upon a battle-field. Colours, drums, arms, and everything, were abandoned in their eagerness to escape, and even while retreating double quick, some failed not to shout *Vive l'Empereur! Vive la Gloire!* as vociferously as if they had been the victors instead of the vanquished.

An unlucky random shot struck Lisle's left arm, and fractured the bone just above the elbow. He uttered a sudden cry of anguish, and reeled backward several paces, but propped himself upon his sword. Ronald Stuart rushed towards him, but almost at the same moment a half-spent cannon-shot (one of the last fired by the train sent to dislodge the ninth brigade) struck him on the left side, doubled him up like a cloak, and dashed him to the earth, where he lay totally deprived of sense and motion. When struck, a consciousness flashed upon his mind that his ribs were broken to pieces, and that he was dying; then the darkness of night seemed to descend on his eyes, and he felt as if his soul was passing away from his body. That feeling, which seemed the reverse of a terrible one, existed for a space of time scarcely divisible. There was a rushing sound in his ears, flashes of red fire seemed to go out from his eyes, and then every sensation of life left him for a time. The regiment thought him dead, as few escape a knock from a cannon-shot, and no one considered it worth while to go towards him, save Louis Lisle. All were too intently watching the flashing weapons of the cavalry as they charged again and again, each squadron wheeling to the right and left to allow the others to come up, and the work of slaying and capturing proceeded in glorious style. Poor Ronald's loss was never thought of by his comrades.

"Stuart's knocked on the head, poor fellow!" was his only elegy. One life is valued less than a straw, when thousands are breathing their last on the awful arena of a battle-field.

Louis, whose left arm hung bleeding and motionless by his side, turned Ronald on his back with the right, and saw that he was pale and breathless. He placed his hand on the heart, but it was still. He felt no vibration.

"Great Heaven! what a blow this will be for my poor sister! Farewell, Ronald! I look upon your face for the last time!" He groaned deeply with mental and bodily agony as he bent his steps to the rear,—a long and perilous way, for shot of every size and sort were falling like hail around, whizzing and whistling through the air, or tearing the turf to pieces when they alighted. Hundreds of riderless horses, many of them greys, snorting and crying with pain or terror, were galloping madly about in every direction, trampling upon the bodies of the dead and the wounded, and finishing with their ponderous hoofs the work which many a bullet had begun.

The slaughter among the French at that part of the field was immense; but their case might have been very different had they stood firm and shown front, as British infantry would have done.

One thousand were literally sabred, ridden down, or cut to pieces; two thousand taken prisoners, with two eagles—one by a serjeant of the Greys, and all the drums and colours; a catastrophe which scarcely occupied five minutes' time, and which Napoleon beheld from his post near La Belle Alliance with sensations which may easily be conceived, for these troops were the flower of his numerous army.

This was about half-past four in the afternoon, and over the whole plain of Waterloo the battle was yet raging with as much fury as ever.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SISTER OF CHARITY.

When Ronald again became conscious that he was yet in the land of the living, he found himself in a waggon, the uneasy jolting of which occasioned him great agony. It was driven by two sturdy Flemish peasants, clad in blue *blouses* and red caps, as he could perceive by the light of the moon: they sang merrily some uncouth song, and appeared to be in a happy state of intoxication.

The Flemings were driving furiously, at a rate which threatened every moment to overturn the vehicle, and it was incessantly bumped against a wall on one side of the highway, or a high foot-path which bordered the other. Ronald often implored and commanded them to drive slower, but they heeded him no more than the wind. However, they were compelled to slacken their speed on approaching Waterloo, where, in a short time, they were brought to a halt altogether, the road being completely choked up with the wounded,—thousands upon thousands of whom were on their way to Brussels on foot, a few on horseback, and many in waggons. It was now midnight, as the toll of a distant church-clock announced. A horrible medley filled the air around the place where Stuart's waggon stopped. The cries of the wounded were piercing. In their agony, strong men were screaming like women, and the appeals for water from their parched tongues were piteous in the extreme. Some of them were men who had been wounded on the 16th at Quatre Bras, but hundreds of the sufferers who were maimed on that occasion, perished under the fury of the next day's storm in the forest of Soignies, whither they had fled for shelter on the temporary advance of Napoleon.

The highway was as much crowded as the field with dead and dying, and the waggons of the train, the baggage-carts, the commissariat caissons, &c., were every moment increasing in number, all pressing to get along the choked-up road. The hubbub was increased by foreign and British cavalry, and mounted officers riding, some to the front and some to the rear, as their duty led them, and threatening to sabre any one who opposed their passage. Oaths, threats, and execrations, in English, French, Belgic, and German, resounded everywhere. It was a medley of horror and confusion, such as few men have ever looked upon.

The boors who drove the waggon in which Stuart lay, abandoned it and left him to his fate. He was utterly heedless of what it might be. He had never felt so weary of life, when suffering under any disaster, as he did at that moment; and he sincerely envied the dead who lay around him. The pain of his bruised side was intense, and he would gladly have given mountains of gold, if he had them, for a single drop of water to moisten his parched and swollen tongue. His head felt hot and heavy, but there was no one near to raise it.

He sunk again into a stupor, and all that passed during the remainder of that dismal night seemed like a dream. He was still sensible of acute pain, but the jolting of the rumbling waggon, when again in motion, seemed like the motion of a ship at sea, and he thought himself once more in the Bay of Biscay, on board the Diana of London.

From his feverish slumber he was roused by feeling his forehead bathed with some cool and refreshing liquid, by hands soft and gentle, like those of a female; but this, too, he deemed imagination, and his eyes remained

closed. But the bathing continued, and became too palpable to be mistaken. When he looked around, he found himself in an airy and elegant room, with white flowing drapery hanging gracefully from the windows, and from the roof of the French couch upon which he lay. Instinctively he raised his hand to his neck, to feel for the portrait of Alice Lisle. It hung no longer there, but was placed in his hands by the kind fairy who had taken upon herself the office of being his nurse. He turned to look upon her, but she glided away.

"I am dreaming," murmured he, and closed his eyes; but on opening them again, the same scene met his view. The room was richly carpeted, the furniture was costly and elegant, the ceiling was lofty, and covered with painted birds and angels, flying among fleecy clouds and azure skies. The pictures on the wall were large Dutch cattle-pieces and glaring prints of Oudenarde and other battles, and a most agreeable perfume was wafted through the apartment from several Delft vases filled with fresh flowers, which adorned the polished side-tables and lofty marble mantel-piece. Ronald looked from one thing to another in silent wonder,—he could not imagine whither he had been conveyed; but that which most attracted his attention was the figure of a female,—a nun he supposed her to be,—whose face was turned from him, and who seemed to be kneeling in a meek and graceful attitude of prayer, so he had an opportunity of observing her particularly.

Her costume was very simple, but, from its shape, amply displayed her very beautiful bust and whole figure. It consisted of a tight body and wide skirt of black serge, girt round her slender waist by a white fillet. She wore a hood of white silk, from beneath which one bright ringlet fell over her shoulder. There was something very bewitching and coquettish in that stray love-lock, and it gave fair promise that there was much more worth seeing under the same little hood. Her hands were very small, and very white; but they were clasped in prayer, and her face seemed to be turned upwards.

"Heavens!" thought Stuart, "I am back again in the land of guitars and pig-skins. This is witchcraft, and Waterloo is all a dream. Bah! my wound says no! Where am I?" said he aloud. "*Buenos dios, gentil senora,*" he added in his most bland Spanish.

"Ah, monsieur!" said the lady, springing towards him, "you have awakened at last."

"French, by Jove!" thought the invalid. "Napoleon has beaten us, and I am a prisoner."

"Ah! I have prayed for you very earnestly, and Heaven has heard me."

"What!" said Ronald in astonishment, "have you really been praying for *me?*"

"For *you*, monsieur," replied the young damsel, seating herself by his side.

"How very good of you, mademoiselle! But to what do I owe such happiness,—I mean, that you should take any interest in me?"

"Monsieur," said she pouting, "I pray for all,—the good Christian and the heretic alike."

Her face was very pretty, almost beautiful, indeed; rather pale, perhaps, but there was a girlishness, a pure innocence of expression in her soft dove-like hazel eyes, which made her extremely attractive. She seemed somewhere about sixteen,—a mature age on the Continent,—and had all the air of a lively French girl turned prematurely into a nun.

"I am extremely fortunate that you should interest yourself so much about me, mademoiselle," said Ronald in a tone sufficiently doleful,

although he attempted to assume a gallant air. "But will you please to tell me where I am just now?"

"In Brussels, monsieur."

"Brussels? Good."

"See," continued the fair girl, drawing back the curtains; "there is the gay Sablon-square, and yonder the good old church of holy Saint Gudule, with its two huge towers and beautiful window."

"And this splendid house?"

"Belongs to the widow of Mynheer Vandergroot."

"And you, my pretty mademoiselle,—pray who are you?"

"You must not call me mademoiselle," said she demurely.

"What then?"

"Sister."

"Sister?"

"*Oui, monsieur.* I am called Sister Antoinette de la Miséricorde."

"A strange name!"

"I think it very pretty, monsieur; I am called so among the *Sœurs de la Charité.* But never mind my name, monsieur; you speak too much, and disturb yourself. How glad I am to see you looking so well, after being in so deep a sleep all yesterday."

Ronald put his hand to his head, and strove to recollect himself.

"Was I not at Waterloo yesterday?"

"No, monsieur; the day before. Alas, what a day it was! But you must not speak any more,—and *must* obey me in all things. I am your nurse."

"*You!*" exclaimed Stuart in a tone of pleasure and surprise, while he attempted to take her hand; but she easily eluded him. "Ah, what a happiness for me, mademoiselle!"

"Sister!" said she, holding up her tiny finger. "I am your only nurse, and I have six other officers on my list. Poor creatures!" she added, while her fine eyes became suffused with tears. "Alas! they are dreadfully wounded, and I experience great horror in being their attendant; but my vows must be fulfilled. 'Tis the work of Heaven, and the poor Sister Antoinette must neither shrink nor repine. But your wound, monsieur; you were struck in the side, but there is no blood."

"But I am bruised to death, Antoinette."

"*Mon Dieu! mon ami;* so the medical officer said. But here he comes, and I must be gone, for a time at least."

At that moment the door opened, and the assistant-surgeon entered. He made a profound bow to the lady,—imitating a style he had picked up in Castile, and causing the black plumage of his regimental bonnet to describe a circle in the air.

"Well, my dear Mademoiselle Antoinette," said he, taking her hand, "how is our patient this morning?"

"Indeed, monsieur, I know not," replied the girl with confusion, and attempting to withdraw her hand.

"I fear, Antoinette, if the troops are all provided with such nurses, they will be in no hurry to quit the sick list, which it is our interest to keep as empty as possible; but—"

Here mademoiselle broke away from him, and, snatching up a little basket of phials, fled from the apartment.

"Well, Ronald, my man," said the *medico*, unbuckling his broad-sword and seating himself by the bed; "how do you find yourself this morning?"

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"Having ended your flirtation, 'tis time to ask, Dick," replied the invalid pettishly.

"What! are you turning jealous of a girl that nurses half the regiment? Let me see your knocks,—how are they?"

"Confoundedly sore! My ribs are all broken to pieces, I think."

"Scarcely," replied the doctor, passing his hand over the injured part; they are all as sound as ever they were. Do you find *that* sore?" said he, deliberately poking his finger on particular places with the most medical *nonchalance*.

"The devil, Dick! to be sure I do," said Ronald, wincing, and suppressing a violent inclination to cry out, or punch the other's head.

"Sore, eh?"

"Very," said the other sulkily.

"Ah! I thought you would."

"I suppose you mean to follow up this attack, by prescribing bleeding and hot water?"

"The first, certainly; the last, as may be required," said Stuart, the doctor in his turn getting a little piqued.

"I have dozed away a whole day," said Ronald.

"You find yourself all the better for it now. We will have you on your legs next week."

"But the battle! You have kept up such a gabble, Dick, I have not had time to ask you if we won it."

"Who else could win it? But I will tell you all, after I have looked to your hurts."

"No; tell me first of the battle, and be as brief as possible."

"Well, then, Buonaparte was soundly beaten on the 18th, and is flying towards Paris, I believe. Wellington and old Blucher are after him, double quick."

"Our loss?"

"I have not heard."

"How is Lisle, and all the rest of ours?"

"I have not yet learned where Louis is billeted, but I fear his arm is lost. Captain Little was killed close by me, after you were struck. Fifteen officers are wounded, and eight killed; but you shall hear not another word till I have seen your wound more particularly, and have applied some dressing."

The cannon-shot had bruised his side severely. It was frightfully discoloured, and he was almost unable to move in consequence of the intense pain which he suffered.

The doctor, producing a silver case of lancets, proposed bleeding, a course to which Ronald stoutly objected, saying that he felt weak enough already. He was therefore fain to content himself with leaving directions for the preparation of an enormous poultice, and a diet of broth and barley-water. He then took his leave, saying that he had more than a hundred patients on his list, and should be totally unable to call for two days at least; but desired Allan Warristoun, Ronald's servant, to come every evening, and report how his master was. The doctor's prescription gave Ronald considerable relief, notwithstanding the throwing out of window of a considerable portion of the ingredients, and the discussion, with infinite relish, of certain delicacies which, after a few days, were brought to his bed-side by the kind old widow Vandergroot.

Converting Warristoun's knapsack into a desk, Ronald sat, propped up in bed, writing a letter for Alice, and another for Lochisla, for he was still ignorant of the change which had taken place there, when Sister Antoinette,

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entering lightly and softly, stole to his side. Her gentle hand was on his shoulder, and her soft eyes were beaming on his, almost before he was aware of her presence. Her silken hood had fallen back, and revealed her fine glossy hair,—all, save the long stray ringlets, beautifully braided like a coronet around her head. Her order were not robbed of their flowing tresses on taking their vow upon them.

Ronald tossed the knapsack upon the carpet, and caught her hand with an exclamation of pleasure. She permitted him to retain his hold for a moment. He would have spoken, but she placed her finger on his lips, and again told him that she was his nurse, and that he "must not speak." The finger belonged to a very pretty hand, though it was unadorned by ring or bracelet; and, taking it again within his own, he ventured to kiss it. The sister drew back instantly, and blushed crimson; but not with displeasure, for she seemed too amiable and gentle a creature to be easily offended.

"I have brought you three books, monsieur."

"A thousand thanks, my dear little sister!" said he, as she produced the volumes from a small reticule, which she carried under the skirt of her long cape. "How very attentive of you! I am always so dull when you are absent."

"I had them, monsieur, from an aged *Reposante* of our order, who in time has amassed quite a little library of her own."

"A French Bible," said Ronald, laying aside the first with an air of disappointment. "What next? 'The holy Doings of the good Sisters of St. Martha.' And the next? 'Rules of the *Servantes des Pauvres de Charité!*' By Jove! my dear Antoinette, these books won't do for me, I fear."

"They are very good books, monsieur," said she modestly. "I am sorry you are displeased."

"*Ma belle Antoinette*, I thank you not the less, believe me; but if any of my brother-officers were to pop in and find me reading them, I should never hear the end of it, and two or three duels would scarcely keep the mess in order."

"I am sorry for it. But if you will not read them yourself, I will; and if any of your wild Scottish officers come in, let them laugh at me if they dare."

"They will take care how they do that in my chamber, Antoinette," said Stuart with a peculiar smile, while the girl threw back her hood and prepared to read, displaying, as she did so, a neck and hands of perfect beauty and lady-like whiteness. She read, in a low, earnest, and very pleasing voice, the story of the good Samaritan, to which Ronald, who was quite enraptured with her appearance and manner, paid very little attention. She read on without ceasing for nearly half an hour, and imagined that the young officer was a very attentive listener. But, in truth, he was too much occupied in observing the admirable contour of her face, her downcast lashes and fine hair, the motion of her little cherry lips and swelling bosom, to attend to the various chapters which she was so good-natured as to select for his edification.

After administering certain drugs, which perhaps neither Widow Vandergroot nor Doctor Stuart, with all their eloquence, could have prevailed on Ronald to swallow, she withdrew, notwithstanding his entreaties that she would remain a little longer.

He felt rather jealous of the attentions she might bestow on others; but this selfish feeling lasted only for awhile. She had several Highlanders, three hussars, and two artillery officers on her list; some of the latter were

minus legs and arms. Next day when she visited Stuart she was weeping, for three of her patients had died of their wounds.

The whole of Brussels had been converted into a vast hospital: every house, without distinction, was crowded with wounded and sick. The officers and soldiers, in some places, were lying side by side on the same floor; and the humanity, kindness, and solicitude displayed towards these unfortunates by the ladies, and other females of every class, are worthy of the highest praise. They were to be seen hourly in the hospitals, distributing cordials and other little comforts to the wounded soldiers of all nations,—friend and foe alike. They were blessed on every side as they moved along, for the poor fellows found sisters and mothers in them all.

Ronald took a deep, and perhaps for so young a man, a dangerous interest in the fair Antoinette de la Miséricorde. He deplored that so charming a creature should be condemned to dwell in a dreary cloister,—her fine features shaded and lost beneath the hideous lawn veil and misshapen hood of the sisters; and that her existence was doomed to be one of everlasting prayer, penance, fast, humiliation, and slavery in hospitals, surrounded continually by the fetid breath of the sick, by distempers and epidemics, scenes of want, woe, and misery, and in the hearing sometimes of sorrow, blasphemy, and horrid imprecations,—for her duty led her into the dens and prisons of the police, and the inmost recesses of the infamous *Rasp-haus*. Whether her own wish, or her parents' tyranny and superstition, had consigned her to this miserable profession, he never discovered; but the life of a galley-slave or a London sempstress would have been preferable.

Antoinette was evidently a lady by manner, appearance, and birth. None but a lady could have owned so beautiful a hand. She had all the natural vivacity and buoyant spirits of a French girl, and, at times, her sallies and clear ringing laughter contrasted oddly with the sombre garb and her half real, half affected demureness.

Ronald formed a hundred plans for her emancipation, but always rejected them as impracticable. To persuade her to elope from Brussels, and go home with him to be a companion for Alice Lisle, would never do. Scandal would be busy, and even should he escape the wrath of the Belgian police, the *mess* would quiz him out of the service.

"What the deuce can be done to save this fair creature from such slavery?" thought he. "I would to Heaven somebody would run away with her! There's Macildhui of ours, and Dick Stuart, our senior Esculapius, handsome fellows both, and both quite well aware of it. Who knows what may come about? The medico is evidently smitten with her, and Macildhui is on her sick list. Since poor Grant was knocked on the head, we have not a married man, except Louis, among us, and Antoinette would be an honour to the regiment."

The combined attention of the interesting little *fille de couvent*, of the widow, of Doctor Stuart, and of Allan his servant, soon placed Ronald on his feet again; and in the course of a week or two he was able to move about the room, and enjoy a cup of chocolate at the window overlooking the square, where a host of crippled soldiers, leaning on sticks and crutches, were seen hobbling about among fresh-coloured Flemish girls with plump figures and large white caps, bulbous-shaped citizens, and pipe-smoking Dutchmen in high-crowned hats and mighty inexpressibles.

Two days after he became convalescent, the sister informed him that now her visits must cease.

"And will you not come to me sometimes, Antoinette?"

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"I am sorry, monsieur; no, I cannot."

"Then I will visit you."

"That must not be either: a man never passes our threshold. I must bid you farewell."

"Ah, you do not mean to be so cruel, Antoinette?"

"There is no cruelty," said she, pouting; "but I mean what I say."

"Our acquaintance must not cease, however," said Ronald, taking her hand and seating her beside him near the window which overlooked the bustling *Rue Haute*. "Must we never see each other more, and only because there are no more confounded drugs to be swallowed and pillows to be smoothed?"

"It must be so, my friend; and I—I hope you have been satisfied with me."

"Antoinette! satisfied? and with *you?* Ah! how can you speak so coldly? My dear little girl, you know not the deep interest I take in you. But, tell me, would you wish to leave Brussels? It cannot be your native place."

"Monsieur, I do not understand—"

"Would not you wish to leave the dull convent of the sisterhood to live in the midst of the gay and the great world,—to live in a barrack, perhaps, and be awakened every morning by the merry reveille or the bold pibroch, or to—"

He paused, for the last observation had been misunderstood. The eyes of the French girl flashed fire, and her pouting lips curled so haughtily and so prettily, that, yielding only to the impulse of the moment, Ronald was tempted to carry on the war with greater vigour.

"Pardon me, Antoinette; I did not mean to offend you," said Stuart, drawing her nearer to him by the little unresisting hand which he still held captive.

"O monsieur! what do you mean?" cried the poor girl, trembling violently, while a deep blush covered her whole face and neck; her sparkling eyes were cast languidly down, and the palpitations of her heart could be distinctly seen beneath the tight serge vest or bodice which encased her noble bust. "*Oh, mon Dieu!*" she added, "what is the matter with me? I feel very ill and giddy." Yet she made but feeble struggles to release herself.

"Promise you will come again and see me, Antoinette," said Ronald, drawing her very decidedly on his knee.

"Oh, let me go, monsieur. I must have the honour to wish you a good morning." She made a motion to go, but his arm had encircled her. "My vows! Oh, pray, for the love of Heaven, let me go. Unhand me, I implore you."

"One kiss, then, Antoinette,—only one kiss; and in sisterly love, you know?" and his lips were pressed to her hot cheek ere she was aware. "But one more, dear Antoinette!" but she burst from his grasp and covered her burning face with her robe, weeping as if her heart would break.

"Holy Virgin, look down upon me!" she exclaimed. "How shall I ever atone for this deadly sin? I *must* confess it, and to the stern dean of Saint Gudule, that the lips of a man have touched mine. Me! a Sister of Charity, a nun, a miserable woman, sworn and devoted to the service of Heaven! Oh, monsieur, you have done me a great wrong; but may Heaven forgive you as readily as *I* do! Adieu! we shall never meet again."

Ronald made an attempt to catch her, but nimbly and gracefully as a she eluded his grasp, and fled down stairs like an arrow, leaving the

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discomfited soldado more charmed than ever with her simplicity and modesty. And it may easily be supposed that the interest she had excited in his bosom was increased when he discovered that, in spite of her vows and veil of lawn, he was not indifferent to the little French nun.

"Still," he reflected, "it is better that we should meet no more. Antoinette is wise; yet I hope she may look up here to-morrow, if it's only to see me for the last time."

To-morrow came and passed away, but the Sister of Charity came not to visit him as usual, and he regretted that he had frightened her away. "However," thought he, "she may yet come to-morrow: the little fairy loves me better than she dares to acknowledge."

Three days elapsed without her visiting him, and it was evident that she would come no more. He grew very impatient and uneasy, and spent most of his time in watching alternately the square and the Rue Haute, with the hope of seeing her pass. Once he saw a Sister of Charity coming from the church of Saint Gudule. Her figure seemed light and graceful as she tripped down the immense flight of steps at the entrance; it was Antoinette, without doubt. Regardless of distance and the crowded street below, Ronald called aloud to her; but she was too far off to hear, and turned a corner down the Rue de Shaerbeck without bestowing one glance on the mansion of widow Vandergroot, which was sufficiently conspicuous by its large yellow gables, its green venetian blinds, and red streaks round the windows. If the little figure which glided along the street were Antoinette's, he never beheld it again.

One day, about a fortnight afterwards, while seated reading a despatch of Wellington's, he heard footsteps, much lighter than those of the substantial widow Vandergroot, ascending the wooden staircase. "She has come at last," said he, as the cigar fell from his mouth; he threw down the paper, and half rose. The door opened, and Lisle entered.

"Louis!" he exclaimed, leaping up with astonishment. "Gracious powers! how changed you are."

"I may observe the same of you! Faith, man! you are wasted to a mummy," replied Lisle, smiling sadly. "I have been winged at last," he added, pointing to his left sleeve, which was empty, and hung, attached by a loop, to a button at his breast. "It is now doing very well," he continued, "but the sight of my empty sleeve and stump will scare the ladies at Inchavon; *that*, though, is the least part of the affair. My soldiering is now ended; the Gordon Highlanders and Louis Lisle must part at last! 'Every bullet'—you know the adage."

"I am glad you bear with your loss so easily."

"Your own escape was a narrow one."

"Very. Had I been a few yards nearer the ridge, where the enemy's guns were in position, that unlucky twelve-pound shot would have cut me into halves like a fishing-rod. But how are all the rest of ours? I have not been abroad yet."

"All doing famously, and ready to swear that the ladies of Brussels are angels upon earth,—the Sisters of Charity especially." This was said unwittingly, but Stuart felt the blood mounting to his temples. "As yet there have been no more amputations, but Macildhui is in a worse predicament than any of us."

"How, pray?"

"He has been deeply smitten with the charms of a certain little French Sister of Charity, by whom he has been, luckily or unluckily, nursed; but his romantic ladye-love has deserted him, without warning, for the last few days, and poor Mac is very sorrowful, sentimental, and all that. He poured all his sorrows in my ear one evening, being thrown completely

off his guard by the mellow influence of a glass of *vin ordinaire* at sixteen sous per bottle. But the Sister—"

"Never mind her," said Ronald, colouring very perceptibly again; "tell me about the army. What's the news from head-quarters?"

"Oh, glorious! the power of France and of Buonaparte has been completely laid prostrate. The army pressed forward into the enemy's country; and Marshal Davoust sent the Marquis of Wellington a flag of truce, craving a suspension of hostilities, and offering to yield up Paris. It was surrendered on the 4th of this month (July), and the marshal commenced his retreat beyond the Loire. Our troops are all in Paris by this time; so make haste and get well, my dear fellow, that you may rejoin. Only think how the rogues will be enjoying themselves in Paris!"

"These are few of ours left to rejoice."

"About one hundred and fifty bayonets are with Campbell, and we have nearly five hundred wounded here in Brussels. That cursed affair at Quatre Bras mauled us sadly. Before the engagement, we marched out of Brussels exactly one thousand and ten strong, and more than one-half lay on the sod ere sunset. Poor Cameron! the corps will feel his loss. By the bye, I forgot to mention that Campbell has got the lieutenant-colonelcy. Our romantic friend Macildhui gets the majority, and you are now senior captain. I hope you will win your spurs ere I see you again. I set out for Scotland to-morrow."

"So soon?"

"Yes. My letters from Virginia and Alice are very importunate; and I shall either sell, or go upon half-pay. I leave Flanders on sick leave, in the first instance."

"Well, I shall soon rejoin you in Perthshire. I have seen enough blood shed and battles won, and long to see the old peak of Benmore, and hear the leaves rustling pleasantly in the woods of Oich and Lochisla again."

Next day Lisle took his departure from Brussels. He still singularly left Ronald in ignorance of what had occurred at home. A thousand times he was on the point of adverting to the subject, but always refrained. In a letter to Alice, he said that he would leave to *her* "the disagreeable task of conveying to Stuart the information of his father's ruin, and the emigration of the Lochisla men; because," continued the letter, "so great is Ronald's veneration for his parent, and such his Highland pride and his love of the old ancestral tower, with all its feudal and family associations, that I verily believe he would shoot himself in the first gust of his passion, were I to acquaint him with what has happened at Lochisla."

Scarcely had Lisle left Brussels, when Ronald found that his thoughts were beginning to revert to Antoinette de la Miséricorde; and longing to see her again, he determined to sally forth the next day and take an airing, in the hope of meeting her in the streets. There were many hobbling about in the sunshine, on the Boulevard de l'Este and the Boulevard du Nord, who had been more severely wounded than himself.

On the morrow, therefore, immediately after discussing his breakfast,—chocolate and a cigar,—he went forth into the streets of Brussels for the first time since he passed through them in a waggon. The noise, whirl, and din of the passengers and vehicles of every kind, caused such a spinning sensation in his head, that he nearly fell to the ground. He moved along the crowded streets, scarcely knowing whether his head or heels were uppermost. The glare of the noon-day sun seemed hot and strange, and everything—the houses, the lamp-posts, the church spires, seemed waving and in motion. With the aid of a patriarchal staff, which erst belonged to Mynheer Vandergroot, he made his way through Brussels, and reached

the long shady walk of the Boulevard de l'Este, where, in thankfulness he seated himself for some minutes on a stone sofa.

The convent of the Sisters of Charity bordered somewhere on the Boulevard. He had been directed thither, not by verbal instructions, but by signs, of which every Fleming seems to be a professor, as it saves the mighty labour of using his tongue. Each mynheer whom he accosted, being too lazy to use his mouth, generally replied by pointing with his long pipe, or by jerking the summit of his steeple-crowned hat in the direction inquired for.

The streets were thickly crowded with military convalescents, of every rank and of many nations. The regimentals were numerous. The English, the Prussian, the Highland, the Belgian, and the Hanoverian, were creeping about everywhere, supporting themselves on sticks and crutches; and in the sunny public areas, long ranks of them might be seen basking on the ground, or propped against the wall on stilts and wooden legs, yet all laughing and smoking, as merrily as crickets.

After a great deal of trouble, Ronald discovered the convent of the Sisters of Charity, somewhere near the end of the Boulevard, at the corner of the Rue aux Laines. It was a huge, desolate-looking building, and might very well have passed for the military prison, which is not far from it. Its windows were small,—grated and far between; and the whole place looked not the less sombre because the morning sun shone cheerily on its masses of grey wall, lighting up some projections vividly, and throwing others into the deepest shadow. He heard a bell tolling sadly somewhere close by, and a strain of choral voices mingled with its iron tones. It rung a *knell*, and a dismal foreboding fell upon Stuart as he listened. He struck gently with the gigantic knocker which ornamented the iron-studded gate, and immediately a panel was pulled aside, and the grim wrinkled visage of the *portière* appeared within. He solicited admittance.

"No man can ever pass this threshold, monsieur," replied the other, who was a little woman of French Flanders, and clad in the garb of the order.

"How is the sister Antoinette de la Miséricorde?"

"Well,—I hope."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Ronald. "But can I not see her, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh, monsieur! that is impossible," replied the portière sadly. "When I tell you she is gone to—"

"To where, Mademoiselle?"

"Heaven;" replied the little woman tartly; and being offended probably at Ronald's impetuosity, she closed the panel in his face without ceremony.

The fragile and delicate creature—how utterly unsuited for the life to which she had been doomed—had fallen a victim to the vile and stupid superstition that had consigned her to a convent. While attending, in her mild and gentle innocency, on the sick in one of the military hospitals, she had been attacked with a violent fever that raged there, and wasted quickly away under its fiery power.

Stuart reeled against the iron-studded door as the words of the portière fell upon his ear, for at that moment he felt sick at heart, and his knees tottered with weakness; but he walked away as quickly as he could, till the requiem of the sisterhood and the iron clang of the bell could no longer be heard amidst the bustle of the Rue aux Laines.

"Poor Antoinette!" thought he, as he turned down the Rue Royale, and, skirting the famous park, made straight for his billet—"fair and gentle as she was, she deserved a better fate than to perish in such a den of gloomy superstition and of blind devotion."

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The poor girl's death made him very sad for some days; but the impression which her beauty and artlessness had made upon him wore away as he grew better, and became able to frequent the *cafés*, the park, the Rue Bellevue, and other public places of resort at Brussels. There the important events following the great victory at Waterloo,—the capture of Paris, the public entry of Louis XVIII., the flight of Buonaparte, and his surrender to Captain Maitland of the Bellerophon, were all canvassed fully and freely, amidst the boasts of the Belgians about the wonders performed by their countrymen on the glorious 18th of June!

After residing in Brussels about two months, Stuart reported himself "well," and was appointed to take command of three hundred convalescents, who were declared fit for service by a medical board, and were to rejoin the Highlanders at Paris "forthwith."

Early on the morning of his departure, just as Ronald was getting on his harness, a man who brought the widow's letters from the *Hôtel des Postes*, placed in his hand one addressed to himself. He tore it open: it was from Lisle, dated "Edinburgh," and ran thus:—

"Dear Stuart,

"I have merely written a short note to announce my arrival in Scotland, and that all are well at Inchavon. Your uncle, old Sir Colquhoun Monteith of Cairntowis, has taken his departure to a better world; and, as we cannot regret his death, allow me to congratulate you on becoming possessed of seven thousand a year, with one of the finest estates in Scotland for shooting and coursing. Messrs. Diddle and Fleece, W. S., Edinr., will send you further intelligence. I have since seen, by the *Gazette*, that Cluny Monteith, your cousin, died of his wound somewhere on the Brussels road.

"Yours, &c."

CHAPTER XXV.

FRANCE.

It was on the morning of the 16th September that Ronald quitted Brussels, having under his command three hundred rank and file of the Gordon Highlanders, as many more of the 42nd, and fifty men of the Coldstream Guards. Three other officers were with him, but he was their senior both by rank and standing. They paraded in the park before the king's palace, in heavy marching order, about six o'clock in the morning, and, moving round the corner of the palace of the Prince of Orange, they proceeded along the Boulevard, after passing through the Namur gate. As they quitted the city, with bayonets fixed and pipes playing before the fifty Coldstreams, who of course marched in front, they elicited shouts of applause from the Belgians, many of whom followed them for many miles on the Waterloo road, and several young women went much farther, so that they never returned at all. Stuart had a very affectionate leave-taking with Widow Vandergroot, whose fat oily face was bedewed with tears at his departure.

Their route, for part of the way, lay through the forest of Soignies; on quitting which, they entered the plains of Waterloo, so lately the scene of that fierce contest in which the greatest empire in Europe had been lost and won. They were now treading on the hallowed ground of the field, and the murmur of conversation, which had arisen among the detachment the moment command to "march at ease" had been given, now died

away, and the soldiers trod on in silence, or spoke to each other only at intervals, and in whispers, for there was something in the appearance of the vast graveyard around them which caused strange feelings of sadness to damp the military pride that burned in every breast.

The morning was remarkably fine, with a pure air and almost cloudless sky. All nature looked bright and beautiful, and the rising sun cast the long shadows of every house and tree far across the level landscape, where everything was beginning to assume a warm autumnal tint.

The farm of La Haye Sainte, the fine old château of Hougoumont, and other houses, were all roofless and ruined, the walls breached and battered by cannon-shot; the parterres, the shrubberies, and orchards, destroyed; but on these wrecks of the strife they scarcely bestowed a look. As they marched over the ridge where the British infantry formed line, the sights which greeted them there caused the Highlanders—naturally thoughtful at all times—to become more so.

"No display of carnage, violence, and devastation, could have had so pathetic an effect as the quiet orderly look of its fields, brightened with the sunshine, but thickly strewed with little heaps of upturned earth, which no *sunshine could brighten*. On these the eye instantly fell; and the heart, having but a slight call made upon it from without, pronounced with more solemnity the dreadful thing that lay below, scarcely covered with a sprinkling of mould. In some spots they lay thick in clusters and long ranks; in others, one would present itself alone; betwixt these, a black scathed circle told that fire had been employed to consume, as worthless refuse, what parents cherished, friends esteemed, and women loved. The summer wind, that shook the branches of the trees and waved the clover and gaudy heads of the thistles, brought along with it a foul stench, still more hideous to the mind than to the offended sense. The foot that startled the small bird from its nest among the grass, disturbed at the same time some poor remnant of a human being,—either a bit of the showy habiliments in which he took pride, or of the warlike accoutrements which were his glory, or of the framework of his body itself, which he felt as comeliness and strength the instant before it became a mass of senseless matter."

The ideas which appear to have pervaded the mind of the writer quoted, were those of every man of that detachment; such, indeed, as the objects in their path, and the mournful scenes by which they were surrounded, could scarcely fail to inspire.

Marching by easy stages, they entered Mons, the strongly-fortified capital of Hainault. During the halt of two days here, most of the officers one evening attended the theatre,—a visit which nearly cost some of them their lives. The play was "The Fall of Zutphen," and the dresses of the actors were as ridiculous as their acting. The ferocious Duke of Alba was represented by a little fat Fleming, clad in a cocked-hat and old red coat; Frederick, his son, by a boor, *en blouse*, who smoked a pipe composedly during the performance. The Dutch troops were represented by a party of Belgian chasseurs, and the Spanish by a strong brigade of motley-garbed scene-shifters and candle-snuffers. At a part of the play where Frederick storms Zutphen, and orders his soldiers to give it to the flames, sparing neither sex nor age in the sack, some ashes dropped from the bowl of this ferocious commander's pipe, and, lighting among some sulphur and other ingredients kept for stage purposes, set the whole scenery in a blaze. Zutphen was in flames in earnest. The players rushed about in every direction, crying for help like distracted people; but the audience, supposing the conflagration to be a part of the play, applauded with increasing vehemence, till the flames of Zutphen began to extend from the

stage to the other parts of the house, and the blazing wood tumbling about their ears, warned the Flemings of their danger. A tremendous rush was made for the door. Stuart was thrown over by the press, and trod under their feet; and had not the officer who commanded a party of the Coldstream Guards menaced the citizens with his sword and rescued him, my narrative would probably have ended here. He dragged him out from the crowd, and they gained the street in safety.

The next stage was Bavay, in France. It is a little, but very ancient town of French Hainault; and the inhabitants, either actuated by loyalty to Louis XVIII., or by some remnant of that old friendship which the French had, or rather pretended to have had, for the Scots, received the Highland detachment with loud acclamations, and the entire population of the little city followed them through its gloomy old streets, till Ronald halted before the Hôtel de Ville, where the magistrates distributed the billet-orders. The soldiers were treated with the utmost attention and kindness by the citizens; and this was the more pleasant, because quite unexpected on entering the enemy's country. It was Ronald's lot to be quartered upon a manufacturer of those woollen commodities which, with iron-plate, are the principal commerce of Bavay. This worthy had a splendid residence outside the city, where his ample garden, orchard, &c., furnished every luxury that the delightful climate and fruitful soil of France could yield him. He received Stuart coldly, for he was one of those thorough-paced business mortals who consider the soldier a burden, a bore, a useless and unnecessary animal. His wife, a plump old dame, in a large French cap and ample petticoat, and mademoiselle her daughter, a lively and good-looking girl about twenty, seemed to think otherwise, and made all the preparations in their power to receive the soldier with attention. There is a mysterious something in the scarlet coat which, to the feminine portion of this world, is quite irresistible.

The young lady made arrangements to give a little *fête* that evening, and all her female companions—everybody that was anybody in and about Bavay—were to be there, and the whole house was turned topsy-turvy; but she was wofully disappointed.

She had been singing and tinkling with the guitar and piano to Ronald for the greater part of the day, and he amused himself by sitting beside her, turning over the leaves of music-books and albums, saying soft little nothings all the while. Madame the mother often sang in accompaniment, and they had become quite like old acquaintances. But the gruff manufacturer of cotton hose and shirts had watched their proceedings with a louring eye, and towards evening he took up a new position, which cut short the preparations for the *fête*. He placed both mother and daughter in durance vile, by locking them up in some retired room; after which he rode off with the key in his pocket. Whether he was influenced by jealousy, or by national dislike, it is impossible to say, but the first is rather unlikely. Mademoiselle was tolerably agreeable, and had a very white hand for the daughter of a plebeian; but her mother was ugly enough to have frightened an old troop-horse, and Monsieur, the cotton manufacturer of Bavay, need have given himself no uneasiness on her account. But the awkward affair made a great noise in the town, and the story was related with various pleasant additions and variations by the officers of the *forty-two* on their arrival at Clichy camp, and there was many a hearty laugh at Ronald's expense in the mess-rooms of the ninth brigade.

Next morning, while the ladies were still under lock and key, the detachments quitted the ancient capital of the Nervii, and marched for La Coteau.

They were now in France; the boasted, "the beautiful, the invincible, the sacred France," marching over it, treading upon its soil,—with bayonets fixed, drums beating, and all the pomp of war,—unobstructed and free, as conquerors. The proud and triumphant feelings attendant on such circumstances conflicted in their breasts with the sentiments of Lord Wellington's order, desiring that the allied army were "to remember that their respective sovereigns were the allies of his Majesty the king of France, and that therefore France must be considered as a *friendly* country." The inhabitants of the towns, and the rural districts also, beheld them march on with apparent apathy; whatever their secret feelings might have been, they were admirably concealed. A few old friends of the Bourbons may be excepted, and these were chiefly old men and women, living in remote parts of the country. In some little villages they were received with shouts of welcome: in large towns, their drums and pipes gave forth the only sounds heard in the streets.

At Cambray, Stuart was agreeably surprised to find that, by certain changes which had taken place in the regiment, he had, as Lisle predicted, gained his "spurs," and was now regimental major.

"You may thank your lucky stars for this rapid promotion, Stuart," said the Guardsman who had saved his life at Mons.

"I may thank death,—the slaughter of Maya, Vittoria, Orthes, Toulouse, and Waterloo rather," replied Ronald. "Certes! I have no reason to complain, though I have seen work, both hard and hot, while *roughing it* in the Peninsula."

"But a major!" continued the other, "and only three-and-twenty! Major! a rank ever associated with ease and good living, the gout, and six allowances of wine at the mess, with a belt of greater girth than that of any other man in the regiment! I congratulate you, my friend, and propose that we wet the commission." And it was "wetted" forthwith accordingly, in some excellent *eau-de-vie*.

This promotion made Ronald completely happy; it was the more agreeable, because, like his accession to the property of his uncle, it was quite unlooked for. As for the death of the latter, he had neither reason to be glad nor very sorry; but he felt as merry as a man can be who has suddenly succeeded to a handsome fortune, and he demonstrated the fact by tossing his bonnet a dozen of times to the ceiling, at which strange employment his friend of the Coldstreams surprised him in his billet at Brussels.

They continued their route by Peronne, Saint Quentin, by the handsome town of Compiegne on the Oise, and through Senlis. The beauty and fertility of the country through which they marched, formed a continual theme of conversation and wonder. Often, for the space of thirty miles, their line of march would be overshadowed by a profusion of apple and pear trees, bordering the highway like one long and matchless avenue. The trees were laden with ripe and tempting fruit; and, in those places where the harvest had commenced, all the inhabitants of the district, men, women, and children, were employed in beating the golden produce from the trees with long poles, and gathering it into vast heaps, which were borne off in carts or baskets to the cider-presses. Everywhere Nature seemed in her richest bloom and beauty, and the hawthorn flower, the day-flower, the woodbine, and the honeysuckle filled the air with the most fragrant perfumes. The march from Brussels to Paris was perhaps the most agreeable that the soldiers had ever performed.

On the 26th of September the detachment arrived at Clichy, a village about two or three miles from Paris. Behind it the British camp was

formed, and the long lines or streets of white canvas bell-tents pitched on the grassy bank sloping down to the Seine, all shining white as snow in the sun, and with "the union" floating over them, formed an agreeable prospect amid the universal green of the scenery around. Guards and sentries were posted round the encampment at regular distances. The regiments were on their several evening parades, and a loud but somewhat confused medley of martial music was swelling from amid the tents, and floated away through the still evening air. On the smooth green banks, and by the sandy margin of the clear blue river, hundreds of soldiers' wives were engaged in the homely occupation of washing and bleaching for the troops; while swarms of healthy but ragged-looking children, belonging to the camp, gambolled and scampered about the green, sailed little ships on the river, played at hide-and-seek among the tubs, around the tents and sentries, as they made the welkin ring with shouts of hearty English merriment. Beyond the camp was seen the snug French village, with its picturesque and old-fashioned houses and still older trees, which had survived many generations of men. There was something very pleasing in the aspect of some of the ancient mansions, the high bevelled roofs, with the upper stories projecting far above the lower,—the walls displaying a quantity of planks running up and down, and crossways, and the gables ornamented with a variety of gilt finials and weathercocks,—all showing the grotesque taste of a remote age. Still farther beyond Clichy, rose the smoke and spires of Paris, which spread afar off like a wilderness of stone and lime, from which rose a murmur like that from a beehive,—the strange mingling but musical hum of a vast and distant city.

Ronald soon "handed over" his detachment, and joined the group of his comrades on the evening parade. By them he was congratulated on his promotion and recovery, and received such an account of the delights of Paris and the neighbourhood of Clichy, that he regretted having been compelled to tarry so long at Brussels.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CHATEAU DE MARIELLE.

IMMEDIATELY after parade next day, Ronald departed from Clichy on a visit to Paris, "the City of delights," as an enthusiastic French author has termed it,—the famous Paris, of which so much has been said, sung, and written. But Ronald was, to a certain degree, disappointed. The look of every man was sad and louring. The armed sentinels of the allies were in every street, their guards on every barrier; cannon were planted to rake every thoroughfare and avenue, and the artillery-men were around them, match in hand, by day and night. The soldier slept with his accoutrements on, and the horse in his harness; and to ensure the peace of the capital, the whole of the troops were ready to act on a moment's notice. The banner of Blucher waved over Paris, and his advance was in front of it, in position on the Orleans road; a brigade of British occupied the Champs Elysées, and the union jack and the white standard of Austria waved over the summit of Montmartre. Proud Gaul was completely humbled, and the Parisian had lost all his swagger, his laughter, and lightness of head and heart. Many of the British officers were insulted, abused,—I believe were spit upon by the lower classes, when the allies first entered

the French metropolis. The people had no other means of giving loose to the sentiments of rage, hatred, and hostility which boiled within them. A resort to open violence in arms would only have ended in the destruction of Paris, and the annihilation of its inhabitants. The defeat on the plains of Waterloo will not be soon forgotten in France. Like the murder of Joan of Arc, it will be handed down from parent to child; and thus, from one generation to another, the hereditary hatred to "perfidious Albion" will increase rather than diminish.

In Paris, and in France generally, the Highland garb attracted more attention, and perhaps respect, than that of any other nation. Notwithstanding the bitter hatred which the French avowedly bear to the whole isle of Britain, they sometimes make a distinction between the Scot and his southern neighbour, as if they were now, as of old, politically aliens to each other. At the cafés, the restaurateurs, the concerts, theatres, promenades, the Boulevards, the Jardin des Tuileries, the Champ de Mars, the Bois de Boulogne, and public places of every kind, the officers who wore the Celtic garb found themselves treated with the utmost respect, attention, and even kindness, when their countrymen belonging to regiments "in breeks" experienced marked coldness and aversion. The figure of a Highland officer passing a milliner's shop, invariably brought all the girls in it rushing to the door. "An officer of the Scots!" was the cry, and all the pretty grisettes were in the street in a moment, to stare at and talk of the stranger until he was out of sight.

Although Ronald had no acquaintances in Paris, excepting those made by frequenting public places, yet he was well pleased with the Parisians, and as long as he had money to spare and to spend, he enjoyed himself in a manner that he had never done before. Through his banker in London, he drew many a cool hundred on his Scotch agents, Messrs Diddle and Fleece; and, for a time, he wasted among grisettes, Frenchmen, and fools, rather more than was quite prudent. Being junior major, he had of course nothing to do but to amuse himself, appear on parade once a day, and ride round the guards and posts when on duty: he spent the whole day in Paris, and generally returned to camp when the *reveille* was beating, so that his hours were rather *early* than late.

One evening, when making up a party for the next day, the hard visage of Serjeant Macrone appeared at the door of the tent, announcing that his round of pleasure was closed. The orderly-book—that tome of ill omen, with its brass clasps and parchment boards, was handed in, while the non-commissioned officer, raising his hand to his sunburnt and wrinkled forehead, conveyed the unpleasant intelligence "that her honour was for tuty,—no the tay pefore the morn, put the fera neist."

"To-morrow? The devil, Macrone! do you say so?" cried the impatient major, snatching the book from the hand of the Celt, and scanning over the brigade orders. "'Major Ronald Stuart, of the Gordon Highlanders, will take command of the detachment ordered to proceed to—' to where? A cursed cramped hand this. Who wrote these orders, Macrone?"

"The orderly serjeant, sir."

"Who is orderly?"

"Just my ainsel, sir. Hoomh!"

"Stupid! Could you not have said so at once. '—Command of the detachment proceeding to the Château de Marielle, to relieve the Hanoverian regiment of Kloster Zeven.' Does anybody know where the Château de Marielle is?"

"Two days' march from this," said Macildhui; "near Melun. I know the place. Archy Douglas and I have shot and coursed over it for a whole

week, without leave or license. 'Tis the property of the Marquis of Laurieston."

"What!" exclaimed one, "old Clappourknuis's brother?"

"The same. You remember him at Merida."

"And what do the wiseacres at head-quarters mean, in sending a detachment there?"

"I suppose they scarcely know themselves. But obedience— We all know the adage."

"Wellington is the man to keep us in mind of that; and old Paok too, with his drills for five hours every Sunday after divine service."

"And so," said Stuart, "we must forego all the gay scenes of Paris to live in an old château among rooks and ancient elms. Country quarters spoil many a gay fellow: we had better leave our razors at Clichy."

"Wellington has ordered you on this service as a change, and to cure you of dangling after actresses and grisettes; for in Paris they quite spoil decent Highlandmen like ourselves."

"There will be neither the first nor the last at Melun,—nothing but brown-visaged and red-haired dairymaids. I hope the château contains Laurieston's family—some agreeable young ladies especially, to make us amends for the loss we sustain in being ordered so far from Paris and this agreeable camp of Clichy, where we have always dry canvas, soft grass, and plenty of sunshine and *vin ordinaire*."

"Ladies! I hope so," added Macildhui. "Pretty faces, guitars, and pianos enliven country quarters amazingly."

Ronald and the four officers who accompanied him were doomed to be disappointed, for the château was occupied only by the regiment of Kloster Zeven, and a few aged servants. The old marchioness and her daughters had retreated to Paris on the first arrival of the lads in scarlet and buff. The Hanoverians marched out of the court of the château, with their bugles playing one of those splendid marches for the production of which Germany is so famous: the Highlanders marched in at the same moment, with carried arms, and their pipes playing "The wee Gorman Lairdie," a tune which Macvurich, the leading piper, adopted for the occasion.

The château stood close to the margin of the Seine, not far from the quiet and pretty little town of Melun, embowered among aged chesnuts, and surrounded by orchards and groves. It was a large irregular building of the days of Louis XII., and was said to have once been honoured as the residence of the celebrated Lady de Beaujeu. It was covered with carved work in wood and stone, and was surmounted by numerous turrets, vanes, and high roofs, covered with singular round slates jointed over each other like the scales of a serpent. It was in every respect a mansion of the old school, and would have been the permanent residence of some respectable ghost of the olden time, had it stood in England, or more especially in Scotland.

The soldiers were billeted at free quarters on the tenants, while the officers took up their residence in the château, to the servants of which orders had been given by the proprietor to provide them with everything they required. Here they enjoyed themselves much more than at Clichy, and the rickety old house was kept in an uproar the whole day, and sometimes the whole night too, by their merriment, pranks, and folly. Its splendid chambers, saloons, and galleries were a good exchange for a turf floor and canvas tent, which, in rainy weather, was never water-tight till it was thoroughly soaked through. The beds, with hangings of silk, ostrich plumes, and silver fringes, for camp shake-downs, and the white satin chairs, stuffed with down, were also a good exchange for stone seats,

trunks, cap-cases, knapsacks, ammunition-barrels, or whatever else could be had in the encampment. The mornings were spent in riding, the days in shooting, till the preserves were ruined and the game exterminated; and the evenings were devoted to chess and cigars, moistened with a few bottles of *Volnay, Pomard, Lafitte, champagne*, port, or sherry, for all the cellars were at their absolute command. A bull-reel generally concluded their orgies, or the sword-dance, performed on the dining-tables; after which they were all carried off to bed by their servants, who, on one occasion, required the aid of a fatigue party.

France is a glorious country in which to live at free quarters, and the Highlanders remained till the end of October completely their own masters, away from old Sir Denis, from Wellington, and staff-office surveillance, amid merriment and jollity, spending their days and nights as they had never spent them before in country quarters, which are generally so dull and lifeless. In the frolic and festivity of their superiors, the privates fully participated, and many a merry though rather confused dance did they enjoy with the cottagers by moonlight on the grassy lawn, where the slender peasant girl, the agile husbandman, and the strong thickset clansman mingled together, leaping and skipping, with better will than grace, to the stirring sounds of the warlike bagpipes.

There was one subject alone which kept Ronald in a certain state of uneasiness,—the non-arrival of letters from his father, although he had regular despatches from Alice and her brother, which were brought him every fortnight from the *Hôtel de Postes* at Melun by Macvurich, who acted as postman for the château. He concluded that all were well at the old tower, but that by some strange fatality his father's letters were always destined to miscarry.

On the 26th of October they took a sad adieu of the venerable Château de Marielle, of its saloons, its parks, its emptied cellars and rifled preserves. Right glad was old Chambertin, the butler, to behold them depart; and I dare say he thanked Providence devoutly, when the last gleam of their bayonets flashed down the old gloomy chesnut avenue. Late on the night of the 25th, an aide-de-camp (Lieut. D—— of 22nd Dragoons) brought Stuart an order, directing him to remove his detachment to Clichy, from which the regiment was about to march *en route* for Calais. It was eleven at night when the order arrived; and by daybreak next morning they were all on the road, with bag and baggage, and had left Melun far behind them. The soldiers were overjoyed at the prospect of returning home, and they cheered and huzzaed lustily as they marched along, and displayed their handkerchiefs on ramrods, and their bonnets on their bayonets, in the extravagance of their delight. So eager were they to rejoin, that they marched back the twenty-eight miles in one day, and arrived in the camp at Clichy just as the bugles were proclaiming sunset.

On the tented ground all were in a state of commotion and preparation. Many regiments were under orders for England; the brigades were broken up, and many alterations were made regarding those troops that were to remain in France, to form the "Army of Occupation," for three years. Next day Ronald mounted and set off for Paris, to pay some of his old haunts a last visit, and to avoid the bustle of the camp, where he left entirely to the care of Warristoun, his servant, the task of packing and arranging his baggage for the cars.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

PARIS, DE MESMAI, AND THE HOTEL DE CLUGNY.

WHILE riding slowly along the Boulevard de la Madeline, Ronald saw before him an officer,—a Frenchman, but one with whose figure he imagined he was acquainted. He was a tall and handsome man, and wore the scarlet uniform of Louis the Eighteenth's garde-du-corps.

"I'll bet a hundred to one that is De Mesmai," said Stuart, communing with himself. "The rogue has changed sides; but I think I should know him by that inconceivable swagger of his."

There was no doubt of his being the cuirassier; and, as he presently stopped to speak at the door of a shop in the Rue Royale, Stuart touched him on the shoulder.

"Monsieur de Mesmai," said he, holding out his hand, "I hope you are quite well. You have not forgotten me, surely; we had some odd adventures together in Spain. You remember the *cura* of?—"

"Monsieur—monsieur— *Diable!* I have quite forgotten your name."

"Stuart, of the Gordon Highlanders."

"Stuart? I remember now. A thousand pardons,—and as many welcomes to Paris!" exclaimed the Frenchman, grasping his hand and breaking into a profusion of bows, every one of which threatened to jerk to the other side of the Boulevard the little red cap which surmounted his large curly head.

"You have been very little about Paris, surely, Monsieur Stuart, very little indeed since the—" he paused and smiled bitterly, "since the allies came to it."

"I have been for two months in country quarters at the Château de Marielle, near Melun."

"Delightful place; I know it well. Fine horse that of yours; very like my old cuirassier."

"And so you have changed sides, I see; like Soult and many others."

"No, by the name of the bomb!" cried the Frenchman, his cheek flushing while he spoke. "No, faith! compare me not with Soult! I was one of the last who quitted the great Emperor, and my honour is spotless. But what could I do, Monsieur Stuart? He has been hurried on by his destiny, his evil genius, or some such villanous agent, to wreck the fame and fortune of himself, his soldiers, and of France, by delivering himself up—*sacre!* to the British. What was I then to do? I had been a soldier from my youth upwards. I had interest to procure a commission as captain in the guards of Louis, who is pleased, *sacre nom de*— bah! to array us in scarlet; and I've been in Paris ever since Waterloo, where I received a severe wound. I have had hard work to get back from King Louis's ministers the poor remnant that dice, wine, and women have left of mine ancient patrimony, which has descended to my worshipful self through as long a line of respectable ancestors as ever wore bag-wigs, steel doublets, and long swords. I lost my château of Quinsay when I went with the Emperor to Elba—that dismal isle, which the devil confound! I gained it again on his happy return to France,—lost it at Waterloo; but regained it when I donned the scarlet in the guards of the most worshipful Louis, our dread lord and sovereign. *Peste!* After all, I am a lucky dog."

It may be imagined that Ronald, having once fallen in with this veteran scapegrace, would have found it by no means easy to escape from his

society, even had he felt disposed to venture on attempting the feat. So well was the young Highlander acquainted with the probabilities in this particular, that he resolved to leave it unattempted; and having, by especial and all but unhoped-for good luck, managed, though in company with his unhesitating friend, to pass two days and nights without coming to any serious bodily harm, he began to feel it incumbent on him to return thanks for his preservation, and to prepare for his approaching departure from the "city of delights."

Before De Mesmai could be induced to allow himself to be persuaded of the necessity of even the last of these proceedings, he insisted on a visit to the Baron de Clappourknuis, who, he averred, had made his peace with the new ministry, kissed the hand of Louis XVIII., burned his commission from Napoleon, and resided quietly at the venerable Hôtel de Clugny.

"This cunning old grey-beard and I took different sides in the last uproar," said the captain, as they walked along. "He went with Louis to Ghent; while I, as in duty bound, joined— But I had better say nothing more. We are now in the streets of Paris, where every second man is either a jack-booted *gendarme* or a villanous government spy. Monsieur le Baron saved his dirty acres by this policy, while I narrowly lost mine and the old house of Quinsay, with its ruined hall, where a colony of rooks, bats, and owls, have been comfortably quartered for more than twenty years. Clappourknuis is as little enamoured of campaigning, as I am of his crack-jaw name. No, by the bomb! had he loved the flash of bright steel and the clank of accoutrements, he would have joined the Emperor on his quitting Elba. And yet I once beheld him charge bravely at the head of a regiment of Polish lancers. They were attacking a solid square of the regiment of Segovia; and it was a splendid sight to behold them, as they swept past the flank of the cuirassiers in line. At the first blast of the trumpet, their thousand lances sunk at once to the rest, their bright heads flashing like a shower of falling stars; and the next moment they were riding into the mass of terrified Spaniards, as one would ride through a river. But he has hung his sabre on the wall, and now reposes in the ancient hotel, basking in the smiles of the fair Diane, and snugly ensconced under the shadow of his laurels, which, by the bye, are very likely to grow into other ornaments less agreeable to his martial brow, if he does not look a little sharper after Madame."

"I told you of my adventure with her on the Pyrenees."

"Yes; you will be a welcome friend, unless the story has roused some unpleasant surmises in the mind of the baron, who is rather inclined to be suspicious, although his pate is so thick that we considered it sabre-proof in the 'Devil's Own.' I know that he looks upon me with eyes the reverse of friendly. *Parbleu!* what care I? Madame Diane behaves to me with remarkable attention. Ha! my friend, you see what it is to have a name: all the women of Paris either love or fear me. While Monsieur le Baron sits in a corner, moping and growling over his swaddled and gouty leg, I draw my chair beside Madame at the harp, and sit turning over the leaves of her music, exchanging soft glances, and saying things quite as soft between. She is an amazingly fine creature, although she jilted so cruelly poor Victor d'Estouville of the Imperial Guard."

"If this is the footing on which you visit the Hôtel de Clugny, I think I could scarcely have chosen a more unlucky companion for my morning call."

"*Pardieu!*" Monsieur, this is Paris, where no husband of sense makes himself in the least uneasy about the intrigues of his wife, and I should wish to teach old Clappourknuis a lesson. He was twelve months a pri-

sooner in England, where he picked up some of the strangest notions in the world about conjugal fidelity and other matters, which, in France, we know only by name. He must now pay the penalty of marrying a giddy creature, young enough to be his grand-daughter. We have a proverb among us, *mon ami*, which says, 'Beware of women, of fire, of water, and the regiment de Sault.' Now I am ready to demonstrate to you logically, that the first part of that proverb— But, poh! here is the residence of Monsieur le Baron. *Pardieu!* a strange old rookery it is; and yet he admires it, because it is the oldest house in Paris."

Passing through an archway, they found themselves in an irregular sort of quadrangle, formed by buildings in a very ancient style of architecture, with mullioned windows, Gothic cusps and pinnacles, casements on the roof, two octagon towers projecting into the court, and one circular turret, which was built out from the wall, and shot up to a great height above the others. Numerous coats of arms and initial letters appeared above the doors and windows, and an antique fountain sparkled and murmured in a corner of the court, with a drooping tree spreading its branches over the stone basin into which the water fell. There was an appearance of picturesque and gloomy grandeur about the place, but there was likewise an air of desolation and decay without, which did not correspond with the rich hangings and furniture that appeared through the open windows; while the bustle which pervaded the court and passages showed that the house was occupied by a large establishment.

"A strange old place, this."

"*Diable!* yes; a gloomy old bomb-house, fit only for the bat and the owl. And yet 'tis here the baron keeps Madame Diane, one of the gayest women within the gay and glorious circle of the Boulevards. 'Tis the Château de Clugny; but for Heaven's sake and our own, do not say anything about it to the baron, who has of late been seized by a fit of antiquarianism, or we shall probably have the whole history of it rehearsed, from the time of Noah down to the present day."

The baron was at home, and a servant announced their names.

He was not much changed in appearance since Ronald had seen him in Estremadura; he looked as rough and weather-beaten as ever, and sat in a gilded easy-chair, rolled in a rich brocaded dressing-gown, with one of his legs swaddled up in a multitude of bandages, and resting upon a cushion. A small velvet forage-cap covered his grey hair, and half revealed a deep scar from a sabre-cut across the forehead.

The apartment into which the visitors were shown was a splendid old chamber, fitted up as a library; and a softened light, which stole through between the thick mullions and twisted tracery of two large windows, cast the varied tints of the stained glass upon the long shelves of richly-gilt but musty old books, on globes, on antique swords and fragments of steel armour, on ancient chairs and deep-red hangings, on spurs and helmets, and on rolls and bundles of papers, heaped and in confusion. The ceiling was covered with stucco fret-work and gilding. Three large portraits were in the room: these were likenesses of the famous Mississippi Law—as he was styled; of Beau Law, shot at the siege of Pondicherry, fighting against the British; and of the Marquis of Lauriston, in his uniform as a General of the Empire, covered with gold oak-leaves and orders.

The Baron, whom they found immersed in the pages of a huge and antique tome, threw it aside on their entrance, and bowed with an air of politeness so constrained, that it was evident Captain de Mesmai was far from being considered a welcome visitor. The consciousness that he had such an introducer made Stuart feel rather uncomfortable, but De Mesmai's consummate effrontery caused him to value the baron's coldness not a

rush. A piano, which stood at one end of the room, was closed. The young baroness was not then at home.

"*Monsieur le Baron,*" said the captain, placing his cap under his arm, and leading forward Stuart, "allow me to introduce Major Stuart, an officer of a Scots regiment, and a very particular friend of mine, who has come to pay you a visit before marching for Calais to-morrow."

"*Eh bien!*" said the baron, extending his hand, and raising his eyebrows. "I am very happy to see Monsieur Stuart; his name is one for which I have a very great respect. "But," he added with a smile, "you give him a bad recommendation in saying he is a 'particular friend' of yours. Remember, you are considered the greatest *roué* and libertine that Paris contains,—between the Champ de Mars and La Roquette."

"*Pardieu!*"

"In truth, you are a very sad fellow," continued the baron, while a servant placed chairs for the visitors. "Your name is on every man's tongue."

"And woman's too."

"Worse still. Ay, Maurice, in Massena's corps we considered you no apostle. But draw your chairs nearer to the fire; 'tis cold this morning. And here, you Monsieur Jacques," addressing the servant, "bring a couple of logs for the fire, and place the glasses and decanters on the table."

A smoky wood fire blazed in a large basket or grate of brass and ironwork placed on the hearthstone: above it rose the arch of an antique mantel-piece. The square space around the grate was covered with small diamond-shaped pieces of Delft ware, which were neatly joined together, and reflected the light and heat.

"Monsieur le Baron will remember that I have not had the pleasure of seeing him since we were last together in Spanish Estremadura," said Ronald; "at Almendralejo, or Villa Franca, I think."

"Indeed, monsieur!" replied the old man, bowing. "Ah, *miséricorde!* I was a prisoner then. You must excuse me; but I have seen so many places and faces, that if I do not exactly remember—"

"I am the officer who shared his ration-biscuit with you one morning at Merida, when the troops were so scant of provisions."

"What! *Mon Dieu!*" cried the old soldier, grasping him energetically by both hands, "are you that officer?"

"I am the same, monsieur."

"How happy I am to have you here in Paris,—in my own house, that I may repay you—at least, as far as hospitality can—for the bestowal of that half-biscuit, wet and mouldy as it was from being carried—"

"A forty miles' march in a wet havresack. I was about to take command of an out-lying picquet, and the biscuit was my first ration for three consecutive days."

"Ay, my friends," said De Mesmai with unusual gravity, while he filled up the glasses, "those were stirring times, when one might see true soldiering."

"I well remember the morning," continued the baron; "and very disconsolate fellows your picquet seemed, as they marched by the light of the grey dawn along the muddy Plaza, with their muskets slung, and their feathers and great coats soaked in water, for the rain was pouring down like a second deluge. On my honour, monsieur! I have often thought of the generous Scottish officer and the wet biscuit. I had been famishing for eight-and-forty hours. Ah! 'twas an interesting adventure that."

"Not so interesting by one half," said De Mesmai slowly, while a

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wicked smile lurked on his moustached mouth; "not so singular by one half as my friend's adventure with the baroness on the Pyrenees, after King Joseph's misfortunes at Vittoria. There is something very unique, quite romantic, in that story."

"Monsieur, was it you who—"

Stuart began to murmur something about having "had the pleasure to be of some service to the baroness—"

"I have heard of it," said the baron. "Oh, monsieur, you quite overpower me with your services. How shall we ever repay you!"

"I was merely instrumental. The officer who had the honour to escort the baroness to Gazan's outposts was killed soon afterwards, when Soult forced the passes."

"On the 25th. Twenty devils! I was there," said the baron, turning up his eyes. "Bloody work it was, and your mountaineers defended the hills with a valour bordering on madness. Your health! monsieur. 'Tis plain *vin ordinaire*, this; I am restricted to its use, but the decanter next you contains *Lafitte*."

"I will take *Lafitte*, with your permission."

The baron bowed.

"*Vive l'Empereur!*" muttered De Mesmai as he raised his glass, while the baron held up one finger warningly, and cast a furtive glance at the door. "I pray to Heaven," continued the captain, whom some old recollections had excited, "that the *violet* may return to France in the spring." He drank enthusiastically. The baron emptied his glass in silence, and Ronald did the same, although he knew that *the violet* meant Napoleon, who was known by that name among his friends and adherents.

"Well, Maurice; I heard you were about to be married to a widow with three streets,—old Madame Berthollet, of the Rue de Rivoli," said the baron. "Or perhaps you are already married?"

"Diable! monsieur," said De Mesmai, indignantly; "do *I* look like a married man?"

"I know not, Maurice; but I imagine that the gay old lady would have little reason to rejoice in her domestic speculation. You are the best man in Paris to make her golden Louis and Napoleons vanish like frost in the sunshine. And so, monsieur," addressing Stuart, "your regiment marches to-morrow?"

"For Calais, *viâ* Montfort, where we shall be joined by two other Scottish regiments, which are also under orders for home."

"A good voyage to the gallant Scots! as our fashionable song says," replied the baron, emptying his glass.

"Excellent!" cried De Mesmai, before Stuart could thank the baron: "and I hope that Madame will soon return, as I wish very much to hear her perform that piece on the piano. Madame Berthollet—"

"Of the Rue de Rivoli?" interrupted the baron.

"—Informed me that her style excels the most celebrated masters in Paris."

"Indeed!" said the baron coldly, but bowing to De Mesmai, whom he heartily wished at the bottom of the sea, or any other place than the Château de Clugny, where his visit had now extended to twice the usual time of a morning call.

"By the bomb! here comes Madame!" said the *ci-devant* cuirassier, as a carriage drove into the court. "Monsieur le Baron must allow me the honour—"

He snatched up his cap, and vanished from the room, while the features of the invalid assumed a most vinegar aspect of anger and uneasiness,

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which he attempted to conceal from Ronald by conversing about the weather and other trivial matters. Meanwhile the captain, with all the air of a true French gallant, assisted the baroness to alight, and led her into the house. They were long in ascending the staircase, and the baron's face grew alternately red and white, while he fidgeted strangely in his easy chair. At last a servant opened the door of the room, and the handsome captain, with his right hand ungloved, led forward Madame, who, as she swept in with her long rustling skirt, and with the feathers of her bonnet drooping over a rich shawl, appeared a very dashing figure, quite a woman of *ton*, and possessing all that indescribable *je ne sais quoi* of face and figure, which are wholly the attributes of what the Scots call "gentle blood," and which never can be attained by the vulgar. Her morning drive on the Boulevards, the exercise of ascending the steep old stairs of the hôtel, and perhaps a sensation of pleasure at meeting with De Mesmai, had heightened the glow of her cheeks, and a rich bloom suffused them. Her eyes were sparkling with French vivacity, and she looked radiantly beautiful.

"Eh! monsieur, my dear friend!" cried she, springing towards Stuart with the bird-like step of a Parisian lady. "How happy, oh! how very happy I am to see you here! I would give you a pretty kiss, if I dared. But pray, monsieur, be seated; and here, De Mesmai, help me off with my things."

"How, madame, do you recognise me after so long a lapse of time, and after such a very short interview? One at night,—by a picquet fire, too?"

"De Mesmai told me you were here," said she, as that adroit cavalier removed her bonnet and shawl, and even adjusted her hair, which was braided above her forehead and fastened behind with a pearl-studded comb *à la Grec*. The soldier laid aside the bonnet, arranged the veil, and folded the collar and shawl with so much the air of a *femme de chambre*, that Stuart could with difficulty repress a smile; but to the lady and her husband it appeared nothing unusual.

"The baroness is a fashionable beauty, certainly," thought the wondering Scot; "but my wife will not be a French woman, thank Heaven!"

"That will do, Maurice," said the lady, freely and easily; "that will do, I thank you. *Mon Dieu!* I shall never wear that horrid shawl any more; mantelets of satin, laced and furred, are becoming all the rage. Maurice, I know you have quite the eye of a *modiste;* tell me, don't you think that a mantelet will become me?"

"Madame would appear superb in anything," replied the other without hesitation, but bowing low while he spoke.

"Oh, Maurice, you are getting quite commonplace. But I suppose it will become me as well as the venerable Berthollet of the Rue de Rivoli."

"Doubtless, madame," replied the guardsman composedly; while, without noticing her roguish look, he handed her a glass of wine.

"And here, this dear naughty husband of mine asks me not a single question about my morning airing," said Madame, as she sprang up and arranged the cushions at the old man's back. "Maurice, help me to punch these pillows. Monsieur the baron has been poring over some musty old book till he has been quite overcome with *ennui*, I suppose. *Mon Dieu!* what a horrid thing it is to become an antiquary!" she continued, as she turned up her fine eyes, and shrugged her fair shoulders. "Do you know, Monsieur Stuart, that ever since the baron became a member of the *Comité Historique des Arts et Monumens*, he has been like a man bewitched!"

The attention of his beautiful wife restored the old man's urbanity and good humour, and when the baroness pressed the visitors to remain to dinner, he seconded her invitation, and they stayed.

Stuart had reason to regret that they did so, for De Mesmai's folly brought about a very disagreeable termination to the visit.

After much common-place conversation, he requested the baroness to favour them with the fashionable air then so much in vogue, and she at once acceded. The old baron was quite charmed with his wife's performance, and, closing his eyes, beat time with his fingers on a worm-eaten volume of Pierre de Maimbourg; but his triumph was somewhat soured by the presence of De Mesmai, who seated himself close by Diane for the purpose of turning over the leaves, and he seemed quite in raptures with her. Stuart likewise was much pleased, for the soft tones of her voice were delightful to hear, and his patriotism was roused and his pride flattered by the words of the song,—"A good Voyage to the gallant Scots." It was a quick and lively air, and had been first adopted by the garde-du-corps and other troops of Louis XVIII., after which it rapidly became popular: the ladies sounded it forth from their harps and pianos, the dandies hummed it on the Boulevards, the boys whistled it in the streets, and the grisettes sung it at their work; and, from reveille till tattoo, scarcely any other tune was heard in the camps, barracks, and cantonments.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CATASTROPHE.

"Ah, madame!" exclaimed De Mesmai, whom experience among his countrywomen had taught that the dose of flattery could never be too strong for them, "how much we are indebted to you! Such brilliancy of instrumental execution, and such a voice! My friend, Major Stuart, will allow—or rather will be compelled to admit—that you far excel any other singer he has ever heard in Paris, Lisbon, or Madrid?"

Although this was not strictly true, Ronald of course replied in the affirmative. There is no flattery which can be too pointed for a *Parisienne*, who can hear, as mere matters of course, such observations as would bring the red blood rushing into the fair face of an English lady.

De Mesmai engrossed to himself nearly the whole conversation of the baroness, and they chatted away, with amazing volubility and merriment, on such light matters as the marriages, intrigues, and flirtations of one-half of Paris,—the fashionable part at least,—while the petulant baron, after various ineffectual attempts to interrupt their interesting *tête-à-tête*, abandoned the idea of doing so; and, while reconnoitring their position with watchful eyes, and listening with open ears, he gave Stuart a very long and very tiresome account of the learned society, to the affairs of which, since the peace of 1814, he had devoted his whole attention.

De Mesmai and the lady, or, to speak more correctly, the lady and De Mesmai, were seated on an opposite sofa, and so close, that their dark hair almost mingled together,—this, too, before the eyes of the baron. They conversed in a low tone, which every instant swelled out into a laugh; and such glances of deep and hidden meaning were exchanged, that, had they been observed, they would have entirely discomposed old Clappourkmais's antiquarian discussions about ruins, medals, coins, MSS., &c. &c. Stuart thought his friend a very odd fellow, and certainly the free manners of the baroness did not heighten his opinion of Parisian wives.

Dinner was served up in excellent style, but what it consisted of has nothing to do with this history. There were enough and to spare of won-

derful French dishes, which the Highlander had never seen before, and probably has never heard of since. Stuart having led the baroness to the dining-room, De Mesmai led her back again to the library, falling into the rear of the baron, who was borne thither in his arm-chair by six stout valets, with his gouty leg projecting like a bowsprit. In this trim, as host, he led the way from the table. Coffee and wine were awaiting them in the library, which was lighted up by wax candles placed in antique candelabras. The crimson curtains were drawn, and a cheerful fire blazed on the hearth and roared up the wide chimney. The old gilt volumes on the shelves, the steel arms and armour, the splendid picture-frames, the wine decanters, the silver coffee equipage, and everything else of metal or crystal, glittered in the ruddy light, and the baron's library appeared the most snug place imaginable.

Stuart, who had been accustomed to sit long at the mess-table,—rather a failing with the valiant ninety-*two*,—was unable to adopt the foreign custom of taking coffee immediately after dinner. He therefore joined the baron in paying attention to a decanter of light French wine; but De Mesmai sipped the simple beverage, seated by Madame at a side-table, where the coffee was served up, and his attentions became so very particular and decided, that in any house in Britain they must have insured his exit by the window instead of the door. But the baron, although a very jealous husband, was a Frenchman, and consequently did not perceive anything very heinous in the attention paid to his wife by the gay guardsman; yet he would rather have seen him lying at full length in the *morgue*, than seated at the little side-table with the baroness.

But Monsieur le Baron having dined to his entire satisfaction, was rather inclined to be in a good humour, and, after a time, he was obliging enough to place the high stuffed back of his easy chair between himself and the *tête-à-tête* which his gay lady enjoyed with her still gayer cavalier.

Finding that Stuart was conversant with *Père d'Orleans*, the *Histoire des Croisades* of Pierre de Maimbourg, and other old authors,—thanks to the *tawse* of his dominie, the old minister of Lochisle,—the baron resolved to make a victim of him for the remainder of the evening, and bored him most unmercifully with long antiquarian and archæological disquisitions, which were varied only by still more tedious accounts of his campaigns under Napoleon.

He spent an hour in detailing enthusiastically the services and deeds of the Scots Guards* in France, from the time that Alexander III. sent them to Saint Lewis for service in the Holy Land, down to the battle of Pavia, where the Scottish corps threw themselves into a circle around Francis I., and he was not captured by the enemy till only four of that brave band were left alive.

"And we are told in this book," continued the prosy baron, laying his hand on a mighty tome of Philip de Comines; "we are told in this book that the life of Louis XI., when he was attacked by the rebellious Burgundians at Liege, was saved solely by the valour of the Scots Guards, who formed a rampart around him till the Burgundians were defeated."

"*Morbleu!* monsieur," said De Mesmai, who now joined them, as the baroness had withdrawn, "the story of the duel between the Sieur de Vivancourt, of the regiment of Picardie, and the Scots Royal, is worth all that you will find in Philip—Philip—*peste!* I have forgotten his name. But I will wager a hundred Napoleons to one, that he does not relate a story by one half so good as that which I have heard from you, of the unpleasant manner in which the English widow of Monsieur of France, Louis XII., was surprised in a *tête-à-tête* with the Duke of Suffolk, in this very

* Now the 1st regiment of the line, or Royal Scots, the oldest corps in Europe.

apartment, by the furious Duke de Valois, who compelled her to marry Suffolk upon the very instant,—ay, *pardieu!* at the very drum-head, as the saying is."

Certain associations occurring to the baron's mind made him colour, as he raised his eyes from his flannel-cased legs, to the tall, erect, and soldier-like figure of De Mesmai. He glanced furtively at the chair of the baroness, but it was empty.

"Ay, Maurice, 'twas a strange affair that; but Monsieur of Valois should have given the English duke a year or two's residence in the Bastile for his presumption. The stone cages of Louis XI. were then in good condition, and should always have been tenanted by such blades as Monsieur of Suffolk."

"You are very savage in disposition, monsieur, to talk of punishing so slight a *faux pas* so severely. But you will allow that a little gallantry is excusable here in our sunny clime of France." The old man glanced keenly at the swaggering guardsman, and saw a strange smile on his face. "A comfortable place this, faith!" he continued; "and if these old walls could speak, they would tell strange tales of hatred and sorrow, joy and grief. Many a fair one's scruples have been routed by the *coup-de-main* of the stout gallants of the olden time. Monsieur le Baron must know that our friend Stuart admires this old house of Clugny amazingly. You cannot conceive the sensations of pleasure with which he viewed that gloomy court."

These last observations were made by De Mesmai to serve an end of his own. It was the baron's hobby to have his house praised, and in return he invariably bored his visitors with a prolix account of it. Having, as he supposed, set fire to the train, De Mesmai retired to promenade in the garden with Madame, while her husband plunged at once into the history of the Hôtel de Clugny. He began with the time when its site was occupied by the palace of the Roman emperors in Gaul, the *Palatium Thermarum*, erected A.D. 300, from which date he traced its history down to Clovis, the founder of the French monarchy, thence to the time of Philip Augustus, who in 1218 bestowed it on one of his chamberlains. On the site of the Palatium Thermarum the Abbot of Clugny built the present hotel, which was finished and completed, as it stands at present, by Jacques d'Amboise in 1505. James V. of Scotland resided in it for some months after his marriage with the beautiful and unfortunate Madeline of France. From that period the indefatigable baron related its vicissitudes, and those of its several occupants, down to the days of the Revolution. He was just describing a celebrated conclave of that revolutionary body, the section Marat, who met in the apartment where they were then conversing, when, on looking round, he became suddenly aware that the baroness and De Mesmai were both absent. He changed colour, stopped in his history, and became much disturbed.

"*Mon ami!*" said he, "where is the Captain de Mesmai?"

"I know not," said Stuart, looking round with surprise, and missing him for the first time. "He was here a moment since, and I did not see him leave the room."

"*Diable!*" growled the baron, grinding his teeth.

"He is probably in the garden enjoying a cigar. I observed him take from his pocket the silver case which he carries."

"A silver case? Pooh! he got that from the baroness."

"A handsome present."

"Ah! she gained it at some lottery in the Palais Royal," said the poor baron, making a desperate attempt to converse freely, while he rung a small hand-bell. "*Attendez, Jacques:* tell Madame we should be glad to

have the honour of her company, because Monsieur Stuart marches to-morrow, and— Ha! ha! what am I saying? You understand—be quick, Jacques," he cried to the valet, who had appeared at his summons. "She is either in her own apartment, or in some of the lower drawing-rooms."

His suspicions were still further aroused. Jacques returned in three minutes, saying that Madame could not be found; that she must have left the hotel, or be promenading in the garden.

"*Mon Dieu!*" roared the impetuous baron, gnashing his teeth at the astonished valet. "Leave the room, rascal! What are you staring at? I am undone! Hand the case, monsieur; these pistols—they are loaded. They are together—I knew it—in the garden. *Sacre!* I have long expected something of this kind. An assignation! the base minion! the worthless *ribaud!* I will have his blood! I will rip him up with my sabre! *Tête Dieu!* am I to be disgraced in my own house? Ha, ha! ho, ho!" and he laughed like a madman.

Stuart rose, feeling all the confusion and astonishment which a visitor might be supposed to experience at such a juncture. The baron seemed bursting with rage, and rolled about among the pillows of his easy chair, making fruitless efforts to raise himself upon his gouty limbs; and he raved and swore in the meantime like a maniac. At last, in the extremity of his distress, he implored Ronald to see if they were in the garden.

"How very foolish he is making himself appear," thought Ronald, as he descended the lighted stair, laughing at the ludicrous aspect of the baron in his cap, gown, and bandaged legs, and his red weather-beaten visage flaming with the fury and exasperation into which he had lashed himself. Descending a stair in one of the octagon towers, he found himself in the garden. The night was very dark, the air was cold, and the trees, shrubbery, and bowers appeared to be involved in the deepest gloom. The darkness seemed greater, in consequence of his having just left the brilliantly-illuminated library, where old Clappourknuis sat growling like a bear with pain and anger. A curtain was drawn back from one of the windows of the hotel, and a stream of light falling across a walk of the garden, revealed the figure of a female. It was the baroness, and Stuart advanced to meet her, feeling considerable reluctance to announce the rage, or hint at the suspicions, of her husband. His cogitations were cut short by the lady springing forward, and throwing herself into his arms.

"*Maurice, mon cher ami!* how long you have kept me waiting," she exclaimed, in a loud whisper. "I have been here on this dreary walk nearly five minutes; and indeed—but one kiss, dear Maurice! and then—Oh! what is this? You have no moustaches. *Ah, mon Dieu!* what have I done?"

She had, when too late, discovered her mistake. At that moment a window of the library was dashed open, and the strange figure of the unfortunate archæologist appeared with a pistol in each hand, threatening death and destruction to all. The light which shone into the garden revealed the scene on the walk,—the baroness hanging on the breast of Stuart, whom, as he was without his bonnet and plaid, she had mistaken for De Mesmai in the scarlet uniform of the garde-du-corps. Clappourknuis muttered a tremendous malediction, and fired both pistols into the walk. Ronald escaped death as narrowly as ever he did, even on any occasion in Spain, and the lady was in equal peril. One ball struck from her head the high comb which confined her hair, and the other whistled within an inch of Stuart's nose; after which it shattered a gigantic flower-pot close by. Diane uttered a shriek, and fled like a startled hare from the garden; and, gaining her own apartment, shut herself up, and Stuart never beheld her again.

"*Morbleu!*" said the incorrigible De Mesmai, whom the destruction of the jar, and the consequent prostration of an immense American aloe, had revealed, "I was just looking for the baroness on the other side of the garden. *Sacre!* 'tis a most unlucky assignation this, and broken heads must follow! Ha ha! how now, my most virtuous Scot, who will not dance with grisettes on Sunday, and yet makes an assignation with a married lady in a garden, and at night! Where are all your precepts and fine sayings? Ho! ho! ho! Hark! how the baron storms and blasphemes, like any Cossack or Pagan!"

"The fierce old madman!" exclaimed Ronald, enraged at his narrow escape. "He was within a hair's-breadth of shooting me through the head!"

"Rather unpleasant, after all your campaigning, to be shot in this way, like a crow," replied the other, who was laughing so heartily that he clung to an apple-tree for support. "How romantic! A touching interview in the dark,—the lady all sighs, and the gentleman all animation! By the bomb, 'tis superb! What a pity there was no moon! A silvery moon would have made the whole affair just as it should have been. But then this unpleasant discharge of small-arms—"

"Dare you attempt to lay the blame of this matter on me?" asked Ronald, indignantly. "You are alone the cause of all this uproar. The baron has mistaken me for you."

"And the baroness has done the same. *Diable!*"

"What is to be done now?"

"Retreat without beat of drum, I suppose."

"That would show but poor spirit, I think."

"*Eh bien!* you are right. I will show face. The baron is only a man, and a man five feet high by six round the waist. I will brazen it out, and swear by a *caisson* of devils 'tis all a mistake. I will, by the bomb! and could do so in the presence of his Jolliness the Pope. *Vive la joie!* Come with me, my friend, and I will explain all the uproar to this outrageous baron. I am used to squabbles of this kind, and will soothe his vivacity. *Peste!* what a hideous noise he makes!"

The baron had roared himself hoarse, and Jacques, with five other stout servants, had been barely able to keep him fast in his arm-chair, where he panted, kicked, and bellowed, swearing by everything in heaven and on earth that he would pistol De Mesmai, slay his wife, and murder them all. He would get a *lettre de cachet*,—forgetting that the days of such matters had happily passed away,—and immure them all in the dungeons of the Bastile. He would rouse the powers of darkness to revenge him! At last a terrible fit of the gout fairly stopped his clamour, and he was borne off to bed, speechless and in imminent danger. The baroness appeared no more, and De Mesmai, the cause of the whole disturbance, sat with perfect *nonchalance*, with his legs stretched out before the library fire, a glass of wine in one hand and twirling a moustache with the other, while swearing to Stuart by the bomb that he had never heard such an outcry before!

"Positively, my friend," said he, "had I carried off the baroness in a chaise and four, *en route* for Calais or Brussels, he could not have made a greater noise. *Peste!* I believe I am entitled to demand satisfaction for this annoyance. I shall certainly consult some of ours to-morrow, and hear what ought to be done."

It was evident that they would see the baroness no more that night, and the domestics of the establishment eyed them with strange looks; for though they were accustomed to the irascible temper of the baron, they were puzzled to account for such a sudden disturbance.

Stuart urged the impropriety of remaining longer, and they rose to

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withdraw. He looked at his watch: it was verging on midnight, and it was requisite that he should return to Clichy forthwith, if he would be with the regiment when under arms at daylight. On leaving, they walked for some time along one of the Boulevards, talking over the affair of the Hôtel de Clugny. De Mesmai did not attempt to exculpate himself, but laughed without ceremony at Stuart, who made some animadversions on his conduct.

"'Tis all a matter of opinion," said he, shrugging his shoulders, "all; and you must know the proverb—*L'opinion est la reine du monde.* 'Tis very true; so let us say no more, my friend."

When near the Place Victoire, they parted. De Mesmai had lodgings in one of the handsomest houses of the Place, although his company of the garde-du-corps was always quartered at the château. On taking leave, they shook hands heartily, and then parted, but without exhibiting much concern, although each knew that he would never meet the other again. But as soldiers, accustomed for years to march from town to town, they were used to partings, and so bade each other adieu with happy *sang froid.*

Ronald never heard of De Mesmai again, and I am therefore unable to acquaint the reader how he settled matters with the baron, or if he married the fashionable widow of the Rue de Rivoli.

The streets were silent, and the night was dark. A cold and high wind swept along the desolate thoroughfares, and had extinguished many of the oil lamps, leaving many places involved in obscurity and gloom. It is not surprising, therefore, that Stuart should have mistaken his way. The dawn surprised him somewhere on the skirts of the town, and he had, consequently, to traverse nearly the whole of Paris to find the Champs Elysées. There he got his horse from the batman, in whose charge it had been left, and in three minutes he was away at full gallop for Clichy. He dashed along the Boulevard de la Madeline, the Rue de la Martin, of St. Croix and Clichy, and soon the fields were around him, bordering the road, while the spires and the streets of Paris were far behind, sinking in the distance.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE HOMEWARD MARCH.

FATIGUED with want of sleep, and almost nodding in his saddle, Ronald reached the camp a little after sunrise. The Highlanders were under arms, formed in line on the green sward between the long streets of tents and the margin of the Seine. The ensigns had unceased the yellow silk colours, the drummers were bracing up their instruments, and Campbell sat motionless on horseback at about a hundred yards from the centre of the line, which he was surveying with a watchful eye. He was looking very cross, so Stuart prepared to be *rowed.*

"A pretty fellow you are, Ronald, to keep the whole regiment waiting in this manner! We were just about to march without you."

Ronald made no reply, but dashed up at full gallop, raised his hand to his bonnet, and then wheeling his charger round, backed him upon his haunches, causing him to curvet and rear, that the rider might display a little horsemanship, as he galloped round the flank of the grenadiers and came up in his place on the left of the line with his sword drawn. As the

band struck up, and the battalion broke into sections of threes and moved off, a cheer burst from the lips of every man, as a parting call to those comrades whom they were to leave behind them.

Saint Gemains was the first stage. They were quartered for the night in the ancient palace, which had long been uninhabited and empty, and was consequently hastening to decay. Eighty years before, who could have imagined that the residence of the exiled Stuarts would have become the quarters of a Scottish regiment in the British service, and plaided and plumed in the garb of the Gaël! Who could have imagined that those desolate chambers, which had been the scene of so many sorrows and troubles to the royal exiles, would re-echo the strains of the heart-stirring pibroch? But the place was dreary, damp, and desolate. The court-yard was overgrown with grass, the gardens had become a wilderness, and the fountains and ornamental statues were in ruins, and covered with the moss of years. Strange and old associations connected with the palace and its inhabitants were awakened in the hearts of the Highlanders, and Ronald-dhu, when the pipers played the retreat in the quadrangle, desired that it should be the 'Prince's Lament,' one of the most difficult pieces of our pipe music.

To the officers and soldiers of the Gordon Highlanders, being generally men from the most remote parts of the Highlands, the empty palace of Saint Germains formed a scene of no common interest. It was intimately connected with the misfortunes of that illustrious race, "of which (says a modern writer) no man can trace the beginning, and of which no Scotsman can bear to contemplate the *end;*" and the kilted sons of the North, as they wandered about its desolate chambers, made many observations which would have startled honest old George III., and have caused the Horse-Guards authorities to stand quite aghast, had they heard them. Although time, as it rolls on, is changing the manners of the Highlander and of his Lowland neighbour, the same chivalric feeling which brought forth the host of 1745, exists in the bosom of the former, and a spark yet lingers there which little might fan into a flame.

Mereville was the next halt. At the gate of the town they were received by a French regiment of royal volunteers, who had no uniform, but wore their cross-belts, &c., over their peasants' blouses of blue or white linen. They paid the compliments of war in very good style, while their band played the national anthem of Britain, and the burghers of Mereville rent the air with shouts of applause. At the barrier appeared the *maire*, arrayed in the garb of a past age—a wide waistcoat and old-fashioned coat, with a silver-hilted sword and ruffles, and a wig and queue. He invited the officers to a *déjeûné* in the Hôtel de Ville, where he made a long and flourishing speech, descriptive of veneration for the British king and for the Scottish people. He spoke of the field of Vernuil, where the Scot and the Frenchman, drawing their swords side by side, as brothers and allies, had tamed the pride of England. *La belle Marie!* He laid his hand on his heart, and became quite eloquent on the subject of her wrongs and woes. He spoke of the alliances between the houses of Stuart and Bourbon, and of the many years of exile which the descendants from these marriages had spent in each other's territories.

The worthy old fellow was so much in earnest, and so enthusiastic on the occasion, that he even shed tears, struck himself a thousand times on the breast, and shrugged his shoulders and turned up his eyes quite as often.

Campbell replied in a short speech, which he had prepared during the long oration of Monsieur le Maire: but the good-will he gained by the

first part of his address, was entirely lost by some unlucky after-allusion to the plains of Egypt and Sir Ralph Abercrombie.

From Mereville they marched to Montfort l'Amaury, a town twenty-eight miles west of Paris, where they were to join the 4th battalion of the Royals, and the 42nd Highlanders, also under orders for England.

At Beauvais, styled—because it has never been taken by force of arms—La Pucelle, the 92nd, to their no small joy, received intelligence that, on landing in England, their destination was to be the capital of their native country, where they were to be quartered for the ensuing winter.

Within four days afterwards, the streets of Calais rang to the notes of the pipe and drum, as the Scots brigade, on its homeward march, passed through the city to the harbour, where a fleet of small craft, provided by the authorities, lay in readiness to carry them over the Passage of Calais, as the straits are named by the French. The Cour de Guise, formerly the ancient English mint, was pointed out to Stuart by a French staff-officer, who rode beside him part of the way. He also showed him the statue of the patriotic Saint Pierre, which stands above the entrance of the town-hall, with its neck encircled by a rope—the emblem of Saint Pierre's heroism, and of the obduracy of an English king. Many other places he pointed out which would have been interesting to the mind of a South-Tweeder, for often had the bluff English yeoman in his steel breast-plate, and the strong-handed archer in his doublet of Lincoln-green, kept watch and ward on the walls and towers of Calais.

As the three Scots regiments marched along the spacious quay, a tremendous cheer burst from them at the sight of the opposite shore. The first view of old England, after a long absence, is worth a myriad of the common-place adventures of life. The land of promise lay before them, but its shore seemed low and distant; and its chalky cliffs were shining white as snow in the morning sun, so pale and dim, that they seemed more like the edge of a vast field of ice than firm land. Every man strained his eyes towards it, and pointed out to his comrades the spires and villages, which he imagined he could trace through the dim haze that floated on the waters of the Channel. Some gazed long and fixedly, with moistened eyes and silent tongues. They thought of the land which lay five or six hundred miles beyond the shore before them—the land of the rock and the cataract, the broom and the heather—the land of their love and best affections, which had never been once absent from their minds during all the danger, the toil, and the glory of the great Peninsular war.

Poor Scotland! although she has lost her name and her place among nations, she is not the less dear to her sons.

The harbour of Calais presented a very animated scene. The frost had passed away; it was a warm, sunny morning, and everything was bright and glistening. From the great quay, two long wooden piers jutted out into the water, which tossed and foamed around the green and sea-weed-covered piles which compose them.

These piers were lined by two or three battalions of French infantry, and behind them were dense crowds of spectators. The French flag was flying on the *beffroi*, or watch-tower, of the Hôtel de Ville, and on the bastions of all the little forts which defended the harbour. The basin was crowded with the boats and craft for the conveyance of the British troops, whom the French authorities were, no doubt, very glad to get rid of. Several British man-o'-war boats were pulling about in different directions. These had been sent by some of our Channel cruisers to superintend the embarkation.

As Ronald rode down towards a flight of steps, to clear the way for the

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regiment, a man-of-war's boat, manned by eight oars, came sheering alongside the jetty. Stuart dismounted to speak with the officer, who stepped forward from the stern, and, abandoning the tiller ropes, shook him heartily by the hand; while the crew, and the crews of the other boats, pulled off their tarpaulin hats, and gave three hearty cheers of welcome to the red-coats. The cheer was taken up by the populace, and resounded along the quays; the French bands struck up the favourite air, "A good Voyage to the gallant Scots," while the troops presented arms, and the officers saluted with their swords. As older regiments than the Gordon Highlanders, the Royal Scots and 42nd embarked first. About two hundred men were in each barge, and, as they moved from the shore by the aid of sail and sweep, their bands played the "Downfall of Paris," an air which could not have been very pleasant to French ears. With better taste, the band of the other regiment played "*Vive Henri Quatre*," the notes of which mingled oddly with those of the bagpipes. The pipers of the whole brigade were seated in the bows of the boats, blowing a perfect storm of wild and discordant sounds.

The harbour, the shore, the crowded quays, receded and lessened; the cheers of the people died away, but the sharp rattle of the brass drums was still heard, and arms were seen glittering on the beach. The French troops were wheeling into open column, and marching through the gate of Calais, which faced the water. As the last section filed through, Ronald looked back for an instant. He saw the flash of French steel for the last time. Save himself, scarcely one had cast a look astern; it was to the increasing shores of England that every eye was directed.

They were soon far out in the Channel, amid fleets of merchantmen and stately ships of war. There is nothing which brings the power, the might, and the majesty of Britain so vividly before the mind, as the splendid appearance of her ships of war. There is a something in the aspect of the formidable row of cannon frowning from the red ports, and the flag that waves above them, which a Briton never can behold without pride, and a foreigner without terror, chagrin, and humiliation.

On clearing the harbour of Calais, and getting fairly out into the Straits of Dover among the shipping, the French airs gave place to "Hearts of Oak" and other national strains; and the cheers with which the crew of every vessel they passed, merchantman or ship of war, greeted the homeward-bound fleet of decked boats with their military freight, afforded the utmost delight to the latter. These hearty welcomes from their countrymen on the sea, were but an earnest of what they were to receive on the land.

The long and glorious struggle in the Peninsula, the victorious termination of the short but most decisive campaign in Flanders, and the results, so important to Europe, of the victory at Waterloo, were yet fresh in every man's mind, and the people of Britain yearned to show their love for their countrymen who were now returning, after having proved themselves the first troops in the world.

It was lucky for this brigade of Scots that they returned so soon after Waterloo. Had those three thousand men fought and gained the battle alone, it is impossible that greater admiration or applause could have been lavished upon them.

The shore increased in magnitude, seeming to rise from the water, and objects became more distinct. The wide extent of yellow sandy beach, the chalky cliffs, the light-houses, the buoys, were seen distinctly, and the flags of all the world were flying around them. The little fleet of galleys moved bravely; a light breeze bore them onward, and every stitch of can-

vas was set. The shore soon seemed close at hand. The old village spires, overhung with ivy, the lawns, the castles, the seats, and everything, from the black old towers of Dover to the boats on the golden beach below, were all remarked and observed as objects of wonder.

"First on the shore! Hoigh!" cried a Highlander, plunging into the water as the boats, containing some of the 42nd, grounded near the beach. "Hurrah!" was the cry, and a hundred eager fellows leaped overboard, knapsacks, accoutrements, and everything; and, with their kilts and sporrans floating on the surface of the water, waded ashore, while shouts of welcome rose from a crowd of the Dover people collected on the sands. The boats containing the Royals and part of the Gordon Highlanders, took the matter more "cannily," and, entering the harbour, landed their military passengers on the pier, where a gentleman stepped forth from the immense concourse assembled to witness the disembarkation, and formally welcomed them to England; he then waved his hat as a signal to the people, and three hearty cheers were given, with one more for the Duke of Wellington.

All the craft in the harbour were decorated with flags and boughs of trees; standards and ribbons waved from every house-top and window. The Waterloo medal, glancing on the breast of every purple coat, attracted universal attention; the people were excited to the utmost pitch of enthusiasm and loyalty, and every proud feeling that is truly British was at its height. Each man vied with the other in the endeavour to show the esteem he felt for those whose deeds had been attracting the attention of the whole civilized world, and whose arms had arrested a torrent which once threatened to subvert every state in Europe. The brigade was billeted for that night in Dover.

"Now then, gentlemen, here we are at last, in merry old England," cried Campbell, in boisterous glee, as, with his officers, he ascended the well-carpeted staircase of a handsome hotel in Dover. "Welcome roast beef and plum-pudding, with other substantials, and a long farewell to *castanos* and garlic, to soup-maigre, *potage au choux*, and the devil's broth. If the people would only grow wise and hang up all the limbs of the law, England would be the happiest land on earth. Look around you, gentlemen; here is comfort! Think on the wet tent, and the wetter bivouac! But good-bye to them all! for awhile at least."

The master of the hotel ushered them into a splendid drawing-room, where the appearance of the rich carpet, and the coal fire blazing in the polished grate, attracted so much attention, and drew forth such encomiums, that mine host of the St. George marvelled in what part of the earth they had been campaigning. He knew not that a coal fire and a carpet are almost unknown on the Continent.

"We have been for some time strangers to this kind of luxury, landlord," said Ronald, observing his wonder. "Our couch and our carpet has long been the green sod, and our covering the sky, for many a year."

"England, merry old England!" exclaimed Campbell, throwing himself into a chair, and stretching his long legs across the hearth-rug. "In spite of all that demagogues may say to the contrary, I will uphold that it is the happiest country in Europe; and, as we have seen the most of them, we should be good judges. This is excellent! It reminds me of our return from Egypt. Now then, monsieur,—pardon me, landlord; I forgot I was out of the land of Johnny Crapaud. Ay, landlord, there is something truly British and hospitable in that. Let us have the best dinner you can get ready on the shortest notice; and tell the cooks they need not be very particular, as we have not tasted a decent dinner since we landed below the castle of Belem in 1809, a few months in Paddy's land

excepted. Let it be prepared forthwith, and remember to provide lots of pudding for the ensigns."

After dinner, the inhabitants of the hotel were astounded by the ceremony of piping round the table, a practice which, since dinners had become common with them, the Gordon Highlanders had revived in full force. As soon as the dessert was removed, tall Ronald-dhu, the piper-major, and eight pipers, entered the mess or dining-room, and marched thrice round the table, and then down stairs, blowing with all their force and power the tune usual on the occasion:—

> "Our ancient forefaithers agreed wi' the laird,
> To buy a bit grundie to mak' a kail-yaird," &c.

and the reader may imagine the effect of seven-and-twenty drones of the great Highland war-pipe on English ears, to which, for many reasons, its strains are so discordant.

The hotel was surrounded by a dense crowd, who kept up an incessant cheering, and in the streets the Highlanders were absolutely mobbed. Perhaps it was the first time the Scottish garb had been seen so far south in England, so that, as the London papers said, "the excitement was tremendous."

In every town and village through which they marched on the long route from Dover to Edinburgh, their reception was the same: they were followed by mobs of shouting men and boys, while laurel boughs, and flags adorned with complimentary mottoes, waved from the houses and church steeples. Every inn or hotel at which the officers dined was decorated with streamers and evergreens, and wreaths of laurel encircled every plate and dish on the tables. Each day, during dinner, they were regaled by a concert of thousands of tongues, shouting and screaming, while the bells in every spire rang as for some great national jubilee.

At Lincoln was erected a triumphal arch, which spanned the highway at the entrance of the city. It was composed of the usual materials—evergreens, and such flowers as could be procured at that season of the year,—and was surmounted by the arms of Scotland, of England, and of the famous old ecclesiastical city, merry Lincoln itself. St. George's red cross was waving from the summit of the ruinous castle, and great Tom of Lincoln was sending forth his tremendous ding-dong, deep, hoarse, and solemn, from the Gothic spire of the cathedral, drowning the mingled din of every other bell in the city. The streets were full of enthusiastic people; the windows were full of faces, flags, and the branches of trees. All were in a state of merriment and uproar, while the shrill fifes and hoarse brattling drums, succeeding the fine brass band, made the streets re-echo with "the British Grenadiers," the most inspiriting of all our national quick steps.

Immediately within the triumphal arch stood a carriage filled with ladies, two of whom, very beautiful girls, the perfect personification of young English belles, with the cherry lips, and merry, bright blue eyes of the south, held aloft bouquets of roses, procured probably from some hothouse, for at that season of the year they could not have been reared elsewhere. At the moment the ensigns were passing with the colours, the ladies made some sign to Campbell, who lowered the point of his sword in salute, and desired his orderly bugler to sound a halt. Each of the fair English girls, with a white riband bound her roses to the tops of the colour-poles, just below the spear-heads, but not without blushes and hesitation, for the eyes of thousands were turned upon them, and the hearts of the unshaven ensigns were captured on the instant. The ladies managed to say part of some address prepared for the occasion, "regretting that they had not a

wreath of thistles to offer, and requesting that the soldiers would carry the flowers home to their own country."

Campbell returned thanks. The ensigns, who, luckily for the regiment, were both very handsome fellows, bore each on his breast the Waterloo medal. They raised their bonnets, and retired to their places in the centre; the music struck up again, and the Highlanders moved forward with the badge of England adorning the shot-splintered poles of their colours.

Of the latter, nothing was left save the gold tassels and that part of the silk which was stitched round the pole, with a few shreds and remnants of embroidery. The rest had all been shot away, or torn to pieces by the rain and wind, by the battles and storms of twenty-one years of continual warfare, in which the corps had borne a distinguished part, since it had been embodied by the Duchess of Gordon in 1794. The appearance of the bare poles attracted universal attention in every town and hamlet. The people were heard to exclaim with wonder, "Look at the colours! look at the colours!" which perhaps they supposed had been reduced by a single volley to the condition in which they then appeared.

The bouquets of the Lincoln ladies remained long attached to the poles, but the first frosty day completed their destruction, and nothing but the stalks were left; yet these still remained when the regiment, after a march of many hundred miles, came in sight of their native country.

Who can describe the wild delight of the Highlandmen, when, from the hills of Northumberland, they beheld afar off the snow-clad summits of the Cheviots, whose sides have been the scene of so many gallant conflicts? A thousand bonnets rose at once into the air, and the "Hoigh, hurrah!" from a thousand tongues made the welkin ring. What a joyous march had been theirs through all merry England! How different in appearance were its cities, its villages, its vast extent of cultivated land, when compared with the ruined *pueblas* and desolate cities of Portugal, or the barren hills and desert plains of Spanish Estremadura. In the former country the soldiers of Massena had scarcely left one stone standing upon another. What a change to these scenes and places seemed the comforts, the luxuries, the happiness of England, especially to those who had been enduring the starvation, the toil, the yearly, daily, hourly danger and misery of continental service! Truly it was a merry march that from Dover to Scotland, and never did private soldiers trudge with their burden of seventy-five pounds weight more contentedly, than the Gordon Highlanders on that long but happy route.

CHAPTER XXX.

EDINBURGH.

At Musselburgh, on approaching the old Roman bridge, the venerable arches of which have so often rung to the tread of a Scottish host, the Highlanders, as they marched down the brae which ascends to the kirk of Inveresk, perceived that some preparations had been made for their reception by the men of the "honest toon,"—the honourable title conferred by Earl Randolph on that ancient burgh. Between the parapet walls of the bridge, on the spot where once stood an antique barrier gate, a triumphal arch was erected, and on its summit sat a bluff old tar in his tarpaulin hat and frieze coat, bearing aloft the standard of the ancient town of Fisherow, of which he was no bad representative. With a voice, which had grown

hoarse and loud in outroaring the waves and blasts of the German Ocean, he welcomed them in the deep Doric language of Scotia, which had so long been a stranger to their ears.

"The song sings truly, 'There's nae folk like our ain folk,'" said Campbell, as he rode along the bridge at the head of the column. "We are home at last, God be praised! This is our third day's march on Scottish ground. Scotland for ever! Shout, my lads! Three cheers for her people! They seem to vie with the English in giving us a kindly reception."

Their cheers were answered with threefold heartiness from the other side of the Esk, where the crowd was immense; and the interest and excitement which prevailed may be imagined from the fact, that the whole line of road between the Esk and Edinburgh, a distance of seven miles, was so densely crowded as to be almost impassable; and when the regiment entered the street of Fisherow, the cheers and uproar were deafening. The pressure of the people forward was so great, that the march was stopped, the ranks were broken, and the music ceased. Hearty greetings and shakings of hands ensued between men who had never met before, and strapping fish-women, in their picturesque blue jackets and yellow petticoats, were seen clinging round the necks of the soldiers; while a crowd of fishermen and peasantry, every man of them with a bottle in his hand, had hemmed in Campbell against the wall of a house, shouting vociferously, each one, that he must drink with them. The colonel abandoned in despair any attempt to proceed, or to urge forward his horse, and sinking back on his saddle, he burst into a hearty roar of laughter at the confused appearance of his men, and the mirth, jollity, and happiness which beamed so radiantly in every face. Stuart was in a similar predicament. The people pressed close around his horse, to every leg of which an urchin was clinging fearlessly, while the rabble shook both hands of the rider without cessation.

After the first wild burst of welcome was over, some order was regained, and the march was resumed; but four hours elapsed before the regiment gained entrance into the High-street of Edinburgh, by crushing through the dense masses which occupied the Abbey-hill and Watergate, where they were again brought almost to a halt. The crowd had followed them in from Musselburgh and increased as it rolled along, and one might have supposed that the entire population of the three Lothians was wedged into the High-street of Edinburgh. Every window of all those lofty houses, which shoot up on both sides of the way, and have been for five centuries a theme of wonder to every traveller, was crowded with eager faces: every lamp-post, every sign-board and door-head bore its load of shouting urchins, and the whole street, from the castle to the palace, was crowded to an excess never before witnessed.

The colonel, who always loved to produce an effect, had sent forward, a mile or two in advance of the regiment, a young drum-boy, who having lost a leg at Waterloo, had had its place supplied by a wooden one; and the appearance of the little fellow, stumping along in his bonnet and kilt, drew immensely on the sympathy of the women of all ranks, from the ladies of *ton* down to the poor vendor of edibles.

"Eh, sirs! Gude guide us! Look at the drummer-laddie! the puir bairn wi' the tree leg!" was the cry on all sides, as the tambour of Waterloo limped along. "Eh! saw ye ever the maik o' that? Oh, wae to the wars, and dule to them that wrocht them! What will his puir mither think at the sicht o' her sodger laddie?"

It was a cunning stroke of policy, sending the mutilated boy forward as advanced guard. His appearance increased the enthusiasm of the

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modern Athenians; and when the long line of dark-plumed bonnets appeared above the advancing masses, pressing slowly into the street at the foot of the Canongate, the cries and cheers resembled, as Campbell said, nothing he had ever heard before, except the "roar of the cannon and musketry at the battle of Alexandria, in Egypt." So many open mouths, so many arms, heads, hands, and hats in motion at once, presented a very odd appearance, and Stuart, in consequence of being elevated on horseback above the dense masses which crowded the way from wall to wall, had a full view of the whole assemblage, and thus possessed an advantage over the officers and soldiers who marched on foot. In some places there might be seen a plumed bonnet floating above a sea of heads, where some solitary Highlander, separated far from the rest of his comrades, was struggling in vain to get forward,—a girl, perhaps, hanging around his neck, two men grasping his hands, a third shouldering his musket, while a fourth held a pint-stoup to his mouth, calling upon him to "drink to the health o' his ain folk."

In other places appeared the long bayonets, the Lochaber axes and cocked hats of the town guard. That ancient civic corps had been ordered to line the streets, but being completely routed by the pressure of the people, they had abandoned their posts and sought shelter behind the long lines of carriages which were drawn up on each side of the street as closely as they may be seen at a race-course.

Never before had Edinburgh witnessed such enthusiasm, such merriment, noise, laughter, hubbub, such shaking of hands, such pressing, crushing, and tumult, as that with which its hospitable inhabitants welcomed the first-returning regiment of their countrymen; and even Campbell himself—with many regrets that poor Fassifern was not there to share in it—declared that he'd never met with anything like it, "even in Egypt!"

To show their respect for their victorious countrymen, even the honest Baillies of Edinburgh, headed by the Lord Provost, turned out in state to welcome them; and upon this occasion, contrary to their usual wont, they arrived on the ground—almost—in time. The Provost had prepared a set speech, and would have delivered it, probably, if he hadn't been frightened almost out of his wits at the outset, and forgotten it besides. So a bold Baillie, in scarlet robe and beaver, got upon his legs to welcome home the Highlandmen; and it is to be regretted that the only part of his speech which has been preserved consists merely of an apology on behalf of the Provost,—an assertion that all Scotland was well assured "no a rajment in the haill service had done sae muckle mischief as the ninety-twa during the wars," and an offer of an unlimited pinch of snuff from a very handsome gold box which the Baillie carried with him, and which the colonel took it for granted contained the freedom of the city at the very least. To all of which Campbell replied in a speech, which to this day may be seen, printed in small capitals, in the *Edinburgh Journal*.

The bows, the sweet smiles, and pretty wreaths of real or artificial flowers which the ladies tossed from the carriages lining the streets, were far more agreeable tokens of admiration than the address of Baillie Mucklewham; and those wounded officers who still bore their arms in slings, found that such honourable badges of war attracted the utmost attention and interest.

Having thus piloted back Ronald Stuart to the Scottish capital, the place in which his military career began, and having brought him thither safe and sound, wind and limb,—with the rank of major, and a moderate fortune besides, the reader may suppose that his adventures are finished. But pause awhile, dear reader! one or two of the most interesting—to him

at least—are yet to come. The regiment halted in the gloomy old quadrangle of the castle, where they were wheeled into line and closely inspected by the commander-in-chief, who complimented Lieutenant-colonel Campbell, in the usual phraseology, on the efficiency and discipline, &c. &c. &c. of the regiment. Campbell replied, that he believed they were in as good trim as when they returned from Egypt, some sixteen years before.

The moment this tedious ceremony was over, Ronald who had been wishing the whole North British staff at the bottom of the draw-well, found himself seated in the "Rob Roy" Perth stage, without having doffed his trappings, and with no other encumbrances than his plaid and claymore. In ten minutes Edinburgh, the city of the seven hills, was far behind him, and the stage was bounding along the Queensferry road, past the hills and woods of Corstorphin, as fast as four blood-horses and four flying wheels could bear it. The heart of the gallant young Scot was leaping with feelings of gladness and delight, which none can imagine save those who have experienced the pleasure of returning home after a long and weary absence. Five years had elapsed since he had travelled that road before, and it seemed a very long time to look back upon. He had seen so many strange scenes, places, and persons in that time, that it seemed like a century.

"Five years ago! Alice was quite a girl then," he repeated to himself. "Ah! Alice will be quite a woman now; but she is my beloved Alice still." At times there flitted across his mind anticipations of something unpleasant occurring, in consequence of his father's obstinate and old-fashioned hostility to the Inchavon family; and he remembered, with peculiar pain, his resentment when his passion for Alice Lisle first became known to him.

It was nearly midnight when he alighted at the George Inn, and he had yet a considerable distance to travel before he should reach Lochisla. Having a stout saddle-horse, he took the road which led to Lochearn, and as he perfectly remembered every by-way and sheep-track, he struck across the mountains, taking a nearer way to Lochisla than the high road; and as there was neither hedge, ditch, wall, or enclosure of any kind, the way was free and open, and he galloped on by beetling crags, by corrie and rock, over ground from which the most heedless fox-hunter would have recoiled with dismay.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LOCHISLA.

THE bright moon was shedding her lustre over hill and valley, and the traveller soon saw the mountain Isla gleaming beneath her beams as brightly as ever he had seen the Ebro or the Douro, and he listened with delight to the murmur of its falling waters as they poured over the shelving linn at Corrie-avon,—a fortunate ducking in the pool of which had so suddenly changed the sentiments of Alice's father towards him.

Now he was on the old familiar road to his home. It was long past midnight. "Such a joyful surprise they will have!" said he, communing with himself, "and a merry new year it will be in the glen; but poor old Donald Iverach, he will look in vain for his fair-haired Evan."

The road was closely bordered by pine and birch trees. The latter were

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bare and leafless, and their stems and branches gleamed like a fairy shrubbery of silver in the moonlight; but the former, the solemn black pines of Caledonia, remained in all their rough unfading foliage, and cast around them a gloomy horror. Steep rocks, where the bright-eyed eagle and the giant glede looked forth from their eyrie, echoing caves, whilom the residence of wild and wondrous beings, the cairns of long-departed chiefs, rough obelisks, marking the ground of ancient battles and covered with mossy figures grim and terrible, bordered the devious way; but he hailed them all with delight, for they were the well-known haunts of his childhood, and his terror of the mysterious beings that were said to guard them had long since passed away. He set up his old hunting halloo as he galloped along, to hear if they re-echoed as of old, and in his glee he shouted fearlessly into a yawning chasm called the Uamhachoralaich, an uncouth name, which means "the cavern of the strange spirit." He hallooed again and again, to hear the voluminous echo which had so often stricken awe and horror into his heart when he was a child; and anon he dashed up the glen, scaring the deer in the thicket and the eagle on the rock, and causing the colleys on the distant hills and moors to hearken and howl in alarm.

Now, Lochiala lay before him! The whole scene burst upon his view at once, as his horse bounded up from the narrow gorge through which the roadway wound. The lonely Highland lake lay sleeping at the foot of the dark and wooded hills, which descended abruptly on all sides towards it. Tall and spectral on its rock, with one side covered with dark ivy and the other gleaming grey in the moonlight, the tower overhung the loch. Far beyond rose Ben-more, dim and distant. The declining moon was verging towards his ridgy back, behind which it would soon disappear. In the tower, or the clachan beneath it, no light was visible. Every loophole and window was dark.

"They are all a-bed; and the poor old watch-dog must be dead, or I should have heard his honest bark before this," said Ronald aloud, as he rode on towards the gate in the outer wall of the fortalice.

There seemed a stillness, an utter absence of life around him, which occasioned dark forebodings of evil, and he felt a strange sadness sinking on his heart. He longed to hear even the crow of a cock or the bark of a dog, but no sound could he detect, save the hoofs of his horse ringing on the frozen pathway which led from the clachan, or onsteading, to the tower. For a moment he became quite breathless with agitation, and clung to the mane of his horse.

"God be praised, there is no scutcheon over the gate!" he exclaimed; "but they lack somewhat of their usual care in leaving it open at this hour."

The gate of the barbican, or outer wall, was lying off its hinges on the earth. Janet's turret was dark. Her light, which she was wont to burn the whole night, gleamed there no longer, and a deadly terror chilled the heart of Ronald. He trembled, apprehending he knew not what, and for some minutes surveyed the court and keep before he dismounted and approached the door. Everthing was mournfully silent and desolate. Part of the barbican wall had fallen down; the wall-flower had sprung up between the stones; the moss and grass grew upon the cope, in the loopholes, and between the pavement of the courtyard. The byres and stables were empty, and midnight depredators had torn away the doors and windows; the once noisy dog-kennel was silent, and the ancient tower was dark and desolate. The watch-dog's mansion was untenanted, and his chain lay rusting on the grassy ground.

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All was as still as the tomb, and the soul of the soldier died within him

The flagstaff was yet on the mossy battlement, but the halliard waved wide on the wind. The old rusty carron gun was yet peeping through its embrasure, but a tuft of knotted grass hung down from its muzzle.

His heart, which so lately bounded with pleasure, now throbbed with apprehension and fear, for the silence around him seemed oppressive and terrible, when contrasted with the bustle he had witnessed in the capital a few hours before.

He struck with the hilt of his dirk on the door, knocking long and loud, and the building echoed like a huge drum, or some vast tomb. Again and again he knocked, but there was no answer save the mocking echoes. He attempted to force an entrance, but the door was locked and bolted fast, and he was compelled to retire. He looked up to the keystone of the arched doorway, but the armorial bearings, of which his father was so proud, the antique crown, and initial letters R. II. R. (ROBERTUS II. REX) were there no longer. The stone remained, but the ancient sculpture was demolished. He muttered some incoherent things, for the memory of the past came swelling up in his breast, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He looked across the moonlit lake towards the islet, where the ruins of the church tower cast a long deep shadow on the graves of his martial ancestors, and their once numerous brave and devoted vassals.

It was a time of the deepest mental agony. A century seemed to have elapsed since the morning. His thoughts were all chaos and confusion, save one, which was terrible and distinct enough,—that he stood by the threshold of his father's house, a stranger, a wanderer, and there was no hand to grasp his, no voice to bid him welcome. After lingering long, he turned sorrowfully from the tower, to awaken some of the peasantry at the clachan. On re-passing the ruined gate, he saw, what had before escaped his observation,—a large ticket or board nailed to the grass-grown wall of the barbican. He approached, and by the light of the moon read the following—

"NOTICE.

"Any person or persons found trespassing on the lands of Rosemount Tower, will be punished with the utmost rigour of the law, by the Proprietor, Zachary Macquabester, Esq., of Rosemount.

"N.B.—Informers will be handsomely rewarded, on applying to Mr. Macquibble, writer, Spy-gate, Perth."

The place swam around him.

"Rosemount Tower! The Proprietor, confound him!" exclaimed Ronald, bursting into fury, "and is it come to this?"

With a heart sick and sore with disappointment, grief, and mortified pride, he descended to the little street of thatched cottages named the Clachan. Here all was silence and desolation too. In some places the roofs had fallen in, and rafters stuck through the thatch, like ribs through the skin of a skeleton: the chimneys had fallen down, and the doors and windows were gone. The hamlet was in ruins. The household fires had been quenched; and as he surveyed the deserted place, he became painfully aware that *his* people—those among whom his race had moved as demigods—were gone forth, and that the place of their birth, and which held the bones of their forefathers, knew them no longer.

The glen, which in his boyhood had maintained two hundred men in what seemed ease and competence to a people so primitive, was now desert and waste. The mountains, the wood, and the water were still there, as they had been in the days of Fingal; but the people had passed away, and Ronald Stuart, to whom the Gaelic *sobriquet—Ronald an deigh nam finn*—might now be truly applied, departed slowly and sadly from Lochisla.

He did not weep,—he was too tough a soldier for that,—and therefore could not experience the calm feeling of resignation and relief given to an overcharged bosom by a gush of hot, salt tears; but, with a heart bursting with fierce feelings and sad remembrances, he departed from the valley just as the waning moon sank behind the darkening mountains. He rode slowly at first; but anon he drove his sharp spurs into the flanks of his horse, and rode towards Inchavon at break-neck speed, as if he would flee from his own thoughts, and leave his sorrows far behind him. But the first gush of gloom and disappointment having somewhat subsided, he strove to calm his agitated spirit, and he derived some consolation in the timely recollection that, although Lowland innovation might have expatriated the people of Lochisla, his father might yet be alive. Eager to learn some tidings, he galloped along with the speed of the wind, outstripping the gathering storm.

"Ha! here is Inchavon at last! Dear Alice will explain to me all this strange mystery."

Forward he went at a hunting pace, and, keeping his body well back and bridle-hand low, he cleared the wall of the park at a bound, and galloped over the whitening lawn towards the portico, under which he reined up his panting steed. The whole mansion was involved in silence and darkness; and as he looked upon its closed windows and gloomy façade, new apprehensions and terrors began to arise before him.

He rang the lobby-bell with fury, and waited long, but without receiving an answer. Again and again he rang, yet no one came. He walked round the house, but every window was closed and dark. The stables were shut up, and the vane on the clock-tower creaked dismally. Neither dogs nor fowls appeared about the kitchen offices; not a bat was stirring, and no sign of life was visible anywhere. Ronald thought that he was bewitched, that there was a glamour over him, or that the land had been deserted by its inhabitants.

The chill snow-flakes were descending thick and fast, and he trembled as much with cold as with apprehension. It was quite a relief when a large mastiff dog bounded forth suddenly, to the full extent of his chain, from his kennel in a corner, and barked furiously; and standing erect on his hind legs, yelled till the house and the surrounding plantations echoed far and near to the sound. At that moment a light flashed out upon the snow, and a man, half-dressed, appeared at an upper window, with a gun in his hand. Ronald was so white with snow, that it was impossible to recognise what or who he was, and consequently his reception was rather rougher than he expected.

"Wha may you be, frien', that come prowlin' aboot honest men's doors at this time o' the nicht—or mornin' rather, eh?"

"Hah!" exclaimed Ronald, "are you Jock Nevermiss,—roaring Jock, the gamekeeper?"

"What the better wad ye be for kennin'?" asked the other, cautiously.

"Come, come, Jock; you must remember me, surely? We have had many a merry day's sport together. Is it possible that you do not know me?"

"Possible eneuch, chield. But its ower cauld the nicht to hae ony mair giff-gaff; sae come back i' the morning, and then we'll see what like ye are. I like none o' yer Southland-tongued folk."

Ronald was enraged at the fellow's pertinacity; but his fierce reply was interrupted by the soft voice of a female.

"Gude sake! surely I should ken his voice! O Jock! Jock! what hae ye been sayin'? It's the young captain o' Lochisla. It's maister Ronald

Stuart o' the tower—Miss Alice's Joe, come home frae the wars! Hand awa, ye muckle gowk Jock! Oh, I ken ye weel, sir; for many a blithe kiss ye've gi'en me to carry to Miss Alice."

In a twinkling the hall-door was opened, and pretty Jessie Cavers, now Mrs. J. Nevermiss, stood palpitating and trembling, with her night-cap on and her feet unshod, by the side of her stout and buirdly helpmate, whose confusion and earnest apologies Ronald at once cut short, for he well knew that honest Jock had been labouring under a mistake, for the unpleasant effect of which he endeavoured to make amends by a hearty but respectful welcome. Ronald shook the snow-flakes from his dress, and from the ample plumage of his bonnet, as they lighted him through a cold but splendid lobby into the library, where a fire was hastily prepared by the nimble little hands of Jessie.

Ronald experienced another disappointment. Lord Lisle and the family were in Edinburgh, where they always spent the winter season. In his hurry to reach the North, he had quite forgotten that; but he was now informed that they were all "as weel as he could wuss them to be;" and Jock, while he stood near the door twirling his bonnet, assured him, with a sly look, that Miss Alice "was a bonnier and a grander young leddy noo, and had turned the heads o' hauf the country side. Young Corrieoich, and many mair, were gone clean wud aboot her."

Old Mrs. Kantweel, the housekeeper, next appeared to bid him welcome.

"O sir!" said she, "ye seem sair distressed and unsettled. Ye'll hae been up the glen, whar there are nane noo, alake! to greet ye at your homecomin'."

"Would to Heaven I had been shot at Waterloo, or anywhere else, rather than have lived till now!" exclaimed he bitterly, flinging away his bonnet and sword, and sinking into a chair. It stung him to the soul to be pitied by servants, however well and kindly they might mean.

"Dinna tak' on sae deeply, sir," continued the matron; "it's sair to bide, but—"

"Enough of this! You mean kindly, Mrs. Kantweel, but I am unused to such consolation," replied Stuart, with that native *hauteur* which he had resumed now that he had again trod upon Highland heather. "I am very sorry for disturbing you all at so untimely an hour; but I request that the whole household will retire to bed, except my old comrade of the muirs, Jock the gamekeeper, with whom I wish to have a few minutes' conversation, after he has seen my nag stabled for the night, or rather the remainder of the morning."

In a few minutes the servants were all in their nests, except Jock, who was invited to seat himself at the opposite side of the library-table, on which Jessie had placed decanters of wine and brandy, with a cold repast, which was, however, left untouched by Ronald.

From Jock he learned the completion of the story of his father's involvement by Macquirk and others, of the sequestration of the effects, the sale of the estate, and of the laird's departure for Canada with his followers; since which nothing had been heard of him. His grief, during the recital, was excessive; but, since fortune had put it in his power to undo all that misfortune had done, he resolved to bear his temporary distress with resignation: it was, too, with a kind of grim satisfaction, that he now remembered having caught a momentary glimpse of a countenance—which it flashed on his mind was that of Æneas Macquirk—pressed against the bars of a loop-hole of the ancient Tolbooth of the Cannongate, on the day the regiment entered Edinburgh so joyously. The worthy Writer having

contrived, by his too-sharp practice, to secure himself accommodation in the building, and seeing little prospect of release save by the assistance of the finisher of the law, usurped the functions of that personage, and finished himself, by means of a noose of his own tying.

With the first gleam of dawn, Ronald quitted Inchavon, rode back to Perth, and returned to Edinburgh as fast as a chaise-and-four could take him; but his spirits were oppressed, and his heart saddened and seared, by the adventures of the preceding night.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ALICE.

At night he was again in Edinburgh, the centre of Scottish science, industry, hospitality, eccentricity, and learning; Edinburgh, equally celebrated for the beauty of its ladies, and the most profound cunning of its lawyers.

It was after drum-beat, that is, eight o'clock in the evening, when he arrived at the castle. The place seemed empty and deserted; save the sentinels on the batteries, not a soul was to be seen. The mess-room was dark and silent, a sure sign of something extraordinary, as the officers were stanch votaries of Bacchus, and seldom roosted before twelve. It immediately occurred to Stuart that some great conflagration, or other cause of disturbance, had happened, and that the magistrates had ordered the regiment into the city. To ascertain the truth, he descended the citadel stairs to the main guard-house, a building situated under the brow of the rock on which the chapel stands, and from the crowning parapet of which Mons Meg overlooks the city and surrounding country.

"Well, Douglas, you seem commandant here," said Ronald to the officer on duty, as he entered.

"How! back already, Stuart? I understood you had leave for six months."

"Never mind; you'll hear all by-and-by. I hope I may need it yet, but you seem to have the place to yourself, and to be very sulky too. I heard you swearing roundly at the drummer just now."

"The little rascal allowed the fire to go out; and as to being sulky, in truth it would vex an apostle, or Job himself, to be left here in command of this dismal post, when all our fellows are enjoying themselves so famously in the city. Yesterday there was a splendid dinner, a regular banquet, given to the serjeants and soldiers by the inhabitants of Edinburgh. It was served up in the assembly-rooms; the great poet, Walter Scott, in the chair, supported by the serjeant-major on his right hand, and grim-visaged Ronald-dhu on the left. A jovial night they had of it! Every cart and other vehicle in Edinburgh was put in requisition to convey our men home, as their legs had somehow failed them. To-night the entire battalion was marched down to the theatre, free tickets to which have been given to every man, from wing to wing. The officers all went off about an hour ago to a splendid ball, to which they have been invited by the *élite* of Edinburgh. It has been got up on a scale never witnessed here before; our ball at Aranjuez is nothing to it. The first people in Scotland will be there,—beauty, fashion, and all that; while here am I, cooped up in this d—ned guard-room! I have a dozen minds to slip down and mingle with

the crowd; Campbell will be too much mystified about Egypt, by this time, to know me, and I believe I might pass unnoticed."

"Very disagreeable, certainly; but not so bad as a wet bivouac on the Sierra de Guadaloupe. Your medal, too; you lose an opportunity of displaying it before some of the brightest eyes in Scotland. But the service—"

"Deuce take the service!" exclaimed the other, pettishly. "If ever I am victimized in this way again, I will sell out, or resign,—upon my honour I will!"

"Alice will be at the ball," thought Ronald, as he returned to his quarters, striding up the citadel stairs, taking three steps at a bound, resolving to attend the assembly-rooms without delay. Notwithstanding the perturbation of his spirits, he was dandy enough to take more than usual care with his toilet, and he found a world of trouble in getting his sash and plaid to hang gracefully, and arranging the heavy folding of the latter to display the large studded brooch; four inches in diameter, which fastened it,—a jewel that, from its brightness and size, completely eclipsed his handsome cross of St. James and modest Waterloo medal. Of the two last-named badges he felt not a little vain, a sentiment excusable in so young a man. As a field-officer, he no longer wore the kilt and tasselled purse. For these the tartan *truis* and gilt spurs were substituted; but they became him not the less, for the tight truis of the Celtic garb display a handsome figure nearly as well as the warlike filleadhbeg.

From the lofty windows of the assembly-rooms a blaze of light was shed across George-street, and fell in broad yellow flakes on the crowd of carriages of every kind, glittering with liveries and harness, and on the upturned faces of a mob of idlers collected around the porches, the piazzas and portico, watching the flitting figures of the dancers as they passed and repassed the curtained windows. Within, every part of the building was gorgeously lighted, and the soft music of the quadrille band, playing the airs then most in vogue, floated along the lofty ceilings and illuminated corridors. Crowds of gentlemen in full dress, or in uniforms, with ladies sparkling with jewels and radiant with beauty, were gliding in every direction to cool themselves after dancing, or to admire the tasteful decorations which met the eye wherever it turned; and conspicuous among these, Ronald, with the greatest delight, beheld the splintered poles and tattered colours which he had so often borne on many a weary march and dangerous occasion.

He looked eagerly around him for Alice, and examined the figure of every lady he passed. Near the door of the hall, where the dancers were, he, almost unconsciously, addressed a lady and gentleman regarding the cause of his anxiety.

"Will you please to tell me if Miss Lisle is here?"

The lady and gentleman smiled, and exchanged glances of surprise.

"Oh, undoubtedly she is," replied the latter. "She is never absent on such a night as this."

"But she never comes till near eleven," added the lady.

Stuart found that he had been saying something foolish, but he bowed with a good grace, and mingled with the crowd to conceal his confusion, for his face was turning as red as his coat.

The appearance of the quadrille parties was splendid. The room was crowded with all that were gay, beautiful, or fashionable in Edinburgh; more than one-half of the gentlemen were in uniform, or in the tartan of their respective clans. The ladies wore a profusion of lofty feathers,

and the effect of so many rich costumes was striking and brilliant beyond conception.

Eagerly as Ronald's heart throbbed to meet Alice, he had no intention of getting up a melo-dramatic scene in the ball-room by accosting her abruptly; he therefore made a reconnoissance of the dancers, keeping aloof, and observing the company in the room from amidst a group of gentlemen who were, as usual in such places, clustered around the door. He felt a light touch upon his arm, and two soft dark eyes were beaming pleasantly and fondly upon his.

"Ah, *senor!* ah, Major Stuart!" said the fair owner with astonishment.

"Hah! Ronald my boy!" added another well-known voice, and his hands were grasped by those of Lisle and his beautiful Spanish wife, who was now a fashionable belle, with nothing of old Castile about her, except her "wild dark eyes," upon which few could look without pleasure and admiration. Her superb figure gave additional beauty to a rich dress of white satin trimmed with the richest lace. A diamond circlet sparkled around her forehead. Virginia had the air of a queen. The time when he had first beheld her, as the half demure, half coquettish Abbess of Santa Cruz, flitted across Ronald's mind; but it seemed more like a dream than a reality. Although on the retired list, Lisle wore his uniform, with his empty sleeve hooked up under the folds of his green plaid, over which hung his medal and Waterloo ribbon.

"How happy I am to see you!" exclaimed Ronald. "I have been looking for you everywhere amid this gay wilderness of people. And you are all well?"

"As well as you could wish us. Alice is here."

"Would to Heaven I could see her!" said Ronald.

"You shall have your wish instantly," replied Louis. "'Tis a splendid affair, this!"

"Our fellows seem to be quite the lions of the night."

"The ball surpasses even ours in the palace of Aranjuez," observed Louis, glancing fondly at Virginia. "But where is Alice?"

"I saw her but a moment ago," replied the donna, whose accent had become much improved by her residence in Edinburgh. "Oh, how happy, how very happy she will be to see you!"

Ronald's heart beat more joyously than ever, and his impatience increased.

"Your sash hides the cross of dear St. James," continued the fair Castilian. "Show it fully, *amigo;* such a badge sparkles well on the breast of a soldier. Alice will love to look upon it; and so shall I, for it will remind me of brave old Spain. We have had many a long conversation about you, for a year past."

"Lord Lisle is here, of course?"

"In one of the ante-rooms, with Campbell and some of the seniors. But we must discover Alice," said Louis; "she is very angry with her field-officer."

"How have I been so unhappy?"

"The carriage was in the High-street yesterday when the regiment marched in, and for nearly half an hour Alice sat in it, watching you unseen."

"Watching me?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens! I never saw her."

"Your horse was jammed by the crowd within a few yards of us; and

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there you remained as fast as King Charles's statue close by, and looking in every direction except towards us. Poor Alie was very much agitated; and you kept your back turned upon her, with very happy *nonchalance*, during the whole of the Baillie's speech, and the rest of the foolery performed in front of the Exchange."

"How unfortunate!"

"The moment the crowd had dispersed sufficiently, we drove to the castle; but you were off no one knew where, and Alice was sorely displeased."

"I was away to Lochisla," replied Ronald, while his brow became clouded.

The band of the Highlanders commenced at that moment "*el Morillo*," a well-known Spanish waltz, which they had learned abroad.

"O, the gay, the graceful waltz! Let me look upon it," said Virginia, bending forward, while her eyes flashed with delight. "Ah! I am dying to have a waltz. 'Tis *el Morillo!*"

"May I have the honour?" said Ronald, taking her hand and leading her forward.

"Stay but a moment—there is Alice."

"Where?—ah! tell me."

"How gracefully she steps! Beautiful! beautiful!"

Stuart looked in vain for the Alice he had known in Perthshire.

"I shall show you afterwards," said the cruel donna. "You will have quite enough of her by-and-by; but we shall be late just now for the waltz." Away they flew into the billiant maze of the waltzers, Ronald clanking his massive spurs at every turn, in a manner he had acquired among the Spaniards. Notwithstanding his practice among the donnas of Spain, he acquitted himself but indifferently. Imagining that every lady who whirled past in succession might be Alice Lisle, he looked everywhere but to the figure of the dance, and various unpleasant shocks took place, which excessively annoyed the Castilian precision of Virginia.

"Stay, stay!" said she; "I will take pity on you. You are too excited to dance. Let us withdraw, and I will show you your fairy queen."

They left the giddy whirl, and after hanging half breathless on Ronald's arm for a moment, "There is Alice!" said Virginia.

"Where? On my honour! I know her not. I cannot recognise her."

"Heavens! do you not know her when she is before you? Oh, for the eyes of a Spanish cavalier! That is Alice in the spangled dress, with the white ostrich feathers in her hair."

"Waltzing with the tall fellow in the uniform of the Archer Guard—the green and gold," added Louis, who had joined them. "Now they leave the dance. The archer is young Home of Ravenspur. He has dangled after Alice for three or four weeks, but I will make the fellow quite jealous in three minutes. Retire to one of the lobbies, and I will bring her to you. She does not know that you are here; but there must be no screaming or fainting, or nonsense of that kind. I believe that, whatever she may feel, Alie will conduct herself admirably."

"For three winters past Alice has been the reigning belle in Edinburgh," said Virginia as she led forth Ronald, who had become considerably bewildered. "She is never absent from a single *fête*, assembly, or promenade; and indeed you have great reason to be proud of her, for she causes more envy among the women, and admiration among the men, than ever woman did before."

"Indeed—indeed!" murmured Ronald, scarcely knowing what he said, or Virginia's information gave him little satisfaction. He had no objec-

tion that Alice should be a belle, but he should be grieved to find her a coquette. The merry laughing Alice of Inchavon woods and braes, the slender girl of seventeen, with her curls flowing wide and free, had become a stately young lady of two-and-twenty, with her hair braided and tortured by a fashionable dresser, surmounted by a floating plume of feathers. Her cheek was paler, and the bloom of rustic health had given place to the graceful air of a young lady of *ton*. Her form was taller and rounder, and—

"Here she comes!" said Virginia, cutting short Ronald's reflections. He became agitated and confused when he saw Louis approaching with a lady in a bright dress leaning on his arm. "She is more beautiful and more devoted to you than ever; so, *amigo*, take courage," said Virginia, pressing his hand. "She knows nothing of what I saw in the convent of Jarciejo, and never shall. Believe me, Ronald, her heart has never in the slightest thought wandered from its love to you."

"Alice! dearest Alice!" said Ronald, springing forward, and throwing an arm around her, while she sank upon his breast, too much agitated to speak. But immediately she disengaged herself, and a deep blush suffused her face and neck, rendering her beauty still more striking. Timidly and hurriedly she looked around, to see whether others than her brother and Virginia had observed this scene.

"Be brave, Alie," said Louis; "there are none here but friends."

"Pho—such a bashful couple!" exclaimed Virginia. "What not a single kiss to give and exchange, after being separate so long?"

"Ronald, love!" faltered Alice, trembling violently, while she tendered her flushed cheek. He then drew her arm through his, and led her towards some of the cool passages, that she might recover from her agitation, and that the tumult of her spirits might pass away. How supreme was their delight! Everything and every one were forgotten in the rapture of that meeting, and there were two hearts, pure and happy—wondrously happy, in the midst of all that gay and dissipated crowd.

"How delighted dear papa will be to see you!" said Alice, after the first outpouring of their joy and affection had subsided,—an affection which had surmounted all the perils of a long separation, the temptations of the gay world, and the dangers of a furious war. They had not looked upon each other's faces for five years—years of grief, doubt, and anxiety; and now, how happy! to find themselves united again, never to separate while on earth. "How happy papa will be to see you!"

"Not more than I shall be to see him, Alice."

"Papa is here somewhere. I saw him only ten minutes ago, with that Celtic goliath your colonel. They will be looking at the dancers."

"You must dance the next quadrille with me, Alice?"

"I am engaged a dozen deep. I am engaged for every dance the night before a ball; and that goose in green, young Home,—heavens! what shall I do?"

"Dance with me, and apologize. I am determined to keep you for the remainder of the night, in spite of Home and all these holiday guardsmen;" and he led her towards the dancers.

How many old and fond recollections were awakened by the sound of her gentle voice! Ronald hung with the purest delight upon every word she uttered. With the same emotions Alice listened to him, wondering that the slender youth whose fair unshaven cheek had been so often pressed to her own, had become the perfect model of a soldier,—stout and well-knit in figure, accustomed to his arms and harness, and rendered swarth in visage by continued exposure to a continental sun. They felt an honest

pride in each other as they moved through the crowded rooms, and many eyes followed them: for the badges sparkling on Ronald's breast, and a slight scar on his sunburnt face, declared that he had acquitted himself well in the field, while Alice was the leading star, the reigning queen, of the fashionable world in Edinburgh.

Ronald's welcome by the old lord was as hearty and kind as he could have wished. He introduced him to Mr. (afterwards Sir Walter) Scott, to Jeffrey, Christopher North, and some other leading characters, who were assembled in one of the ante-rooms. The striking figure of Christopher, with his lank hair hanging over his shoulders like a water-god's, attracted his attention particularly. Campbell was seated in a snug arm-chair, and was detailing sundry anecdotes of Sir Ralph to Scott, who listened to his prosing with his usual politeness and good nature. Except in a foursome reel, Campbell had not been dancing that night. For all fashionable measures he entertained a supreme contempt; the strathspey, or the sword dance, was his delight and his forte. At the other end of the supper-table, ladling hot punch, sat the celebrated Johnnie Clerk (Lord Eldin), to whom Lisle introduced Stuart, who was rather surprised by the oddity of his language and observations.

On his saying something complimentary about the society of Edinburgh, Johnnie replied, "The lassies were weel aneuch; but as for the society, it's no just as it was in my young days, when I first soopit the parliament-house wi' the tails o' my goon."

"How so?" asked Scott.

"Because Edinburgh is just like a muckle kail-pot,—a' the scum is coming to the top."

Lord Lisle, Scott and Christopher, Johnnie Clerk and Campbell, had been sitting beside the decanters for some time, and had contrived to get considerably merry. As usual, Scott was the life of the party, and none enjoyed more than he did the queer stories told him by Campbell about the Highlanders, the adventure with old Mahommed Djedda, the march to Grand Cairo, the campaign in Corsica, and Heaven knows all what more.

Stuart, with Alice, returned to the Ball-room, where they danced together nearly the remainder of the night; Alice braving the displeasure of certain beaux, who, although they were sorely displeased at being jilted, were too well bred, or perhaps too wary, to take any unpleasant notice of it. Meanwhile, the little party in the ante-room became quite convivial, and Campbell, in the midst of his glee, proposed to give the company a song. This offer being applauded, he commenced at once, while Clerk beat time with his ladle and bowl.

> "When Abercrombie, gallant Scot!
> Made Britain's foes to tack again,
> To fight by him it was my lot;
> But now I'm safe come back again."

With a brimming glass in one hand, and a decanter of sherry in the other, he sung the nine verses of this patriotic song in a style peculiarly his own, but as loud as it was out of place; and Ronald, when dancing in the ball-room, heard the tones of his stentorian voice above even the music of the band. The colonel insisted upon Scott singing in turn, although he protested that he was no singer. However, as it was usual in such cases, he gave them a few staves of the old ditty, "Tarry woo," his only song, and one which he very much admired for its old style of verse and quaintness of expression. More songs succeeded, and they enjoyed themselves as much as men could do amid good company and good wine. Christopher

at last set the example of speech-making, because it was an art in which he particularly excelled: he proposed "The health of Major Stuart, the hero of Almarez, &c."

Doctor Stuart returned thanks in the name of his clansmen; but the wine having slightly obscured his perceptions, his speech, somehow, went off into a dissertation upon gun-shot wounds, and the treatment of fractures, simple and compound.

It was five in the morning before this splendid fête concluded. How many headaches or heartaches ensued next day, and how many loves were lost and won, has nothing to do with my story; but several gentlemen flirts—the tall archer especially—went home breathing war and defiance, hair-triggers and rifle-balls, against Stuart, who was too much of a soldier to value their resentment a rush, although he received some distant hints of it.

Other balls and gaieties succeeded, and during the whole of that happy winter the officers of the Highlanders were the lions of Edinburgh. The 78th, the brave Ross-shire Buffs, who arrived soon after, came in for a share of the general attention and festivities. The mess-room tables were covered every morning with invitation cards. The young ladies had all caught the scarlet fever, and would certainly have pulled each other's caps had they worn any; and even the match-making mammas had work enough upon their hands, and were half worried to death—as they deserved.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NEWS FROM AFAR.

MEANWHILE, the arrangements for the marriage of a certain lady and gentleman were proceeding in the most agreeable manner imaginable, and the ceremony was only delayed until some definite information could be procured concerning the fate of the old laird and his followers. Even *the* day was fixed; for three months had elapsed, and no tidings had been heard from Canada.

The Glasgow manufacturer who had purchased Lochisla, established a splendid household and equipage in Edinburgh. By the marriage of one of his daughters with some retired naval captain, who, like most naval captains, was not very particular in his taste, the Macquabester family continued to squeeze themselves into the assembly-rooms now and then, and to give large routes at home, where they carried on—as the saying is—"at hack and manger;" and, one way and another, the poor man squandered away his hard-earned thousands, the gains of many a long industrious year, so successfully, that in a short time he was compelled to betake himself to the loom, while his property was pounced upon ravenously by his creditors. His affairs were managed by Messrs. Diddle and Fleece, clerks to the signet, and they transacted matters so effectually, that Macquabester was soon without a stiver, and his creditors did not find themselves "muckle the better" either. Under its new name of Rosemount, Lochisla was advertised for sale, at a small upset price, and all applications were to be made to Messrs. Diddle and Fleece, at their office in Queen-street. Fifty thousand pounds was the sum required; and Ronald, when he read the advertisement one morning in the mess-room, resolved to become the purchaser, but knew not where to raise the money. While revolving the matter in his mind, without being able to form any definite

plan, a servant brought a note from Lord Lisle, requesting to see him immediately. After a consultation with Alice's father, Ronald found himself able to treat with Messrs. Diddle and Fleece, on whom he called in the forenoon at their chambers; and he found them, there being money in the way, the most smooth-faced, obsequious, and polite men of the quill that Edinburgh possessed. After a delay of some weeks, and a mighty deal of fuss, burrowing and searching among the musty records of the Register-house, and after all sorts of doubts, difficulties, delays, replies and duplies, duplicates and repetitions, amplifications and expenses had been disinterred or created, brought forward and demolished, the affair was settled, and Stuart found Lochisla his own.

One forenoon he sat in the front drawing-room of Lisle's house, lounging on a very comfortable sofa, and occupied in detailing some of his Peninsular adventures to a bright circle of six young ladies, whose fair fingers were plying the needle, with great assiduity, at two large pieces of yellow silk. Several handsome work-baskets lay on the floor, filled with embroidery, gold fringe, silver thistles, letters for battle and achievement, and above all a sphinx, weighty and large enough to please even Campbell, the colonel. The end of the drawing-room, at which the fair workers sat, was covered with shreds and patches like the floor of a milliner's shop. Alice and five of her most intimate companions were busy working a new pair of colours for the Highlanders; and the rolls of silk, upon which the ladies were embroidering, spread from the knee of one to another like some great piece of ancient tapestry. The ladies were all fair and of noble birth, and Master Ronald, who lay with so much Spanish *nonchalance* on the sofa, had the happiness to act as their director; and as the damsels were all anxious to attract the attention of the handsome officer, although they knew him to be engaged to their friend, they were continually asking him questions, where such a badge, such a motto, or the name of such a battle should be placed.

A chubby little rogue, with fair hair and merry hazel eyes, who bore the name of Ronald Lisle, was clambering at his namesake's back, and twisting his curly black locks with dimpled little hands, and crowing and laughing aloud to Alice and the ladies, with whom he was "an angel, a sweet pet, a dear love," &c. &c. He was the very picture of a plump little Cupid; and the ladies bestowed so many kisses and caresses upon him, that Ronald became quite envious, and told the fair givers so.

He was just in the middle of a very animated detail of his adventures with Cifuentes in the wood of La Nava, when the shrill blast of the well-known war-pipe made him stop so suddenly in his narrative, that all the girls looked up with surprise, for the pipe may be heard at all times in every part of Edinburgh.

The performer came nearer and nearer, and the notes of his instrument were making the great square, the lofty dome and portico of St. George's—even the very sky, ring to the warlike blast. It was a great Highland pipe, of the largest size, and Ronald's blood came and went in his changing face while he listened.

"That is the 'Prince's Lament!'" said he.

"Surely I have heard that pipe and tune before," said Alice, throwing aside the standard and her needle, and going to the window. She uttered an exclamation of surprise, and started back.

"'Tis either Donald Iverach or the devil!" cried Ronald impetuously, as he sprung to her side.

"It is indeed poor old Iverach!" replied Alice piteously.

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"My father's piper a beggar in the streets of Edinburgh!—a mendicant in his old age!" muttered Ronald through his clenched teeth, striking the floor with his heel till a spur tore the carpet, while the ladies crowded round him with timidity and astonishment. "What cursed misfortune can have brought this about!"

"Dear Ronald! be composed a little," said Alice, taking his hands within her own; "you *must* obey me just now, and I will obey you by-and-by. I will desire Iverach to be looked after." She rang the bell violently.

The piper was now in front of the house. He stood at the curb-stone and paused a moment,—supposing, probably, that he should not play long in vain before so splendid a mansion. He was clad in the royal tartan; having come of a broken clan, he had always worn the family colours of the house under which his ancestors had been vassals. His kilt, plaid, and coat were worn to rags, and the once bright scarlet checks of the tartan were faded and dark; yet the dirk and claymore were swinging as of old at his nut-brown thigh. He was pale and wan, and evidently broken down with age, want, and sorrow. His silvery hairs were almost destitute of covering, and his feet were in the same condition. The proud expression of his eye was gone; he rarely raised it from the pavement, and when a coin was thrown from a window or the hand of a passer-by, his cheek grew red, and he picked up the gift with such confusion that he forgot to thank the donor.

"Oh, Alice!" groaned Stuart, "now indeed I know that my father is no more. Death, alone, could separate Iverach from him; but I have long been prepared to expect the worst. Let some one take care of the old man, and bring him here."

While he was speaking, the piper was ushered in, and stood near the door, bowing, bonnet in hand, to the ladies successively, with that native dignity and pride, mingled with respect, which a Highlander never, under any circumstances, loses. He bowed profoundly to Ronald, and his keen eyes wandered restlessly over his uniform. Then, as if some sudden recollection flashed upon his mind, the *piob mhor* fell from his grasp; he sprang forward, and bursting into tears, clasped Stuart round the neck.

"It's my ain pairn! It's Maister Ronald! Oich! oich! Got tam! I'm creetin' mair like a bit giglet o' a lassie, than a teuch auld carle that's come through sae muckle! Gude pe thankit we hae met at last, Maister Ronald! I have been wandering to meet ye through many a queer place; but sair and sad are the news I hae to tell ye,—sad and sair indeed. So joost prepare yersel for the warst!"

"I suppose you would speak of my father?" said Ronald with a quivering lip.

"Aich, ay: ta laird, ta laird! Aich, ay! Got pless us!" replied the vassal, bursting again into tears, which he endeavoured in vain to hide by burying his head in the folds of his tattered plaid; while Stuart half reclined on Alice's shoulder, and turned aside, deeply touched with the old man's sorrow,—for grief, like joy, is infectious. "Ay; I wad speak o' the laird, puir man! an' prood he wad hae peen to see his only son coming home frae the wars an' devildoms a stoot an' handsome chield, wi' a proon face, and a hand hardened wi' the hilt o' the proad-sword. But, *ochone-aree!* he's low aneuch the day, an' mony a pretty man tat followed him far awa' ower the wide and trackless seas to the stranger's cauld an' meeserable country."

"Poor, dear old man!" said Alice, while she pressed Ronald's hand to compose him, as the piper was speaking.

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"I have sad news to tell you, too, Iverach," said he. "Poor Evan Bean,—Evan with the fair hair, is no more! I find this to be a sorrowful meeting, Donald; for I have lost my father, and you your only son."

The old man smote himself on the forehead, and reeled back giddily as if struck by a blow; but he almost immediately recovered. He stared wildly at the speaker for a moment, and then said, with strange calmness—

"I never again expeckit to pehauld him, for auld Shanet tauld me his weird; and Shanet never spoke in vain, nor tauld an untrue tale. Her father was a *taischatr*. She said he wad return nae mair,—that he was doomed! The words were hard to pelieve; put I mourned for him then as one that was deid and awa'. Oich! I thought the pang was ower. Put—put, O Maister Ronald! my puir Evan,—and whar was he killed?"

"At Toulouse, Donald—at Toulouse, where we gained a signal victory over France. He died bravely, like his comrades, for all were brave alike: I laid him with my own hands in the church-yard of Muret. But, for pity's sake, Donald, tell me of my father, and the fate of the Lochisla people, and then I will tell you more of your son, who, as a token of remembrance, has sent you the clasp which fastened the green feather of his bonnet. Miss Lisle will give it when you are more composed. Come; take courage, Donald, and tell us your story. There are none here but old friends, who have often danced to the sound of your pipes, and shall yet again,—ay, next month, and in the old hall of Lochisla too!

Alice blushed, and her companions smiled. The old man's eyes flashed a red light through their tears. He looked from one fair face to another, and, as he read nothing but innocence and happiness in them all, he smiled, and appeared to become happy too. After being comforted with a few mouthfuls of mountain-dew, filled from a decanter into an ancient quaigh that he carried, and from which he drank everything, he became quite composed, and commenced his story.

After leaving the Clyde, the vessel containing the emigrants encountered a continuance of adverse winds, and was driven from her course far to the northward of the Canadas, upon the coast of Newfoundland,—the most barbarous and desolate of all the British colonies. Having lost their rudder, and had their compass washed overboard in a gale, the vessel was, while surrounded by a dense fog, carried into Baboul Bay, or, as it is commonly called, the Bay of Bulls, by the strong current which there runs in shore. Finding that the brig was drifting among the breakers, and that she was quite unmanageable, the master ordered out the boats to tow her off, but the order was given too late. The boats were swamped among the surf, and a few moments afterwards the vessel grounded on a reef, where the boiling sea made clean breaches over her every instant. She heeled over on her beam-ends, and the foremast went away by the board, carrying with it the maintopmast and all the rigging above the top. The vessel thus became a total wreck in five minutes.

"At the time the ship struck," continued the piper, "the laird was lying sick in the cabin, unco unwell in mind and body, for he had lang been pining awa' wi' dule and sorrow for leaving you, and the heathery hills o' Albyn, and to find himsel so far awa' frae his tower and glen, and the graves o' his kindred and forbears. When I found that a' was ower, I determined to save him, or to dee wi' him. Drawing our dirks, and vowing we would slay to the death ony man that opposed us, Alpin Oig and mysel rushed into the cabin, and bore him therefra in our arms upon the deck, and frae there into a boat, the last ane that was

left. The sailors tried to crowd in, but our bare blades keepit them off. Nae man, woman, or bairn frae Lochisla, though death was staring them in the face, wad hae thocht their ain lives worth savin' if the laird's was lost; and sae a' helpit us into the boat, where we solemnly swore, on the blades of our dirks, to return and take as many frae the wreck as we could, and a line was thrown us to make fast to the shore. The laird lay as if he was dead at the bottom o' the boat, wi' naething on but his dressing-gown, and the saut sea pouring like rain ower him. Ochone! it was an awsome time for me! Puir gentleman! he was helpless as a wean in our hands."

Owing to the denseness of the fog, there was no shore to be seen but the beach, or what they supposed to be the beach could be discerned through the unnatural mid-day gloom by the white foam of the breakers, towards which the two brave and determined Celts, who had never been on rougher water than the loch of the Isla, urged their frail bark with all the strength of bending oars and muscular arms. They soon lost sight of the water-logged wreck, which the fog enveloped like a shroud; but the shrieks and prayers of those on board were heard ringing above the roar of the wrathful breakers, which hurl their crested heads with such tremendous fury on the desert beach of Baboul Bay.

When within a few feet of the shore, their attention was arrested by a loud splitting sound, a crash as if a mighty oak was rending asunder, and a tremendous cry rose from the face of the waters to Heaven. They looked back in dismay. The sea was covered with pieces of the floating wreck, and human heads and hands appeared at times above the white surf, beneath which they were all engulphed in succession. At the same moment nearly that the ship went to pieces, a wave like a mountain rolled against the stern of the boat, with a shock like that of an earth-quake. Iverach was stunned by its weight and fury; the light seemed to go out from his eyes, and he heard a horrible hissing in his ears, as he sank into the abyss,—the trough of the sea. Darkness was around him, and agony was in his heart, as he groped about in the sinking boat. He was grasped convulsively in the strong arms of his terrified companion, and down they went together,—down, down, he knew not how deep, for he became senseless, and could feel no more.

When life returned, he found himself lying upon the beach, drenched with the bitter surf, and covered with shells and sea-weed. It was evening, and the sun, setting behind the hills, cast a long line of radiance across the glassy sea. All traces of the brig, save those that lay scattered on the shore, had disappeared. Corpses were strewed upon the sand,—the cold and wet remains of men, women, and children, once the poor but happy cottiers of Lochisla.

Night was closing around him; he was alone, upon the desert shore of a strange country, and the heart of the aged and superstitious Highlander died away as he looked around him. In front lay the hateful sea, which had destroyed his companions, and behind was a homeless, howling wilderness, a savage solitude, which he shuddered to look upon. He saw everywhere rocks, mountains, bogs, and thickets of stunted firs, which grew to the very edge of the cliffs and overhung the water; but there were no signs of any human habitation, and he strained his eyes until they grew stiff in the sockets watching the vast wilderness to the westward,—yet no wreath of smoke rose from it. Save the whistle and whir of the plover and curlew, or the splash of the seals that were sporting and floating among the shattered ruins of an iceberg, no signs of life manifested themselves around him.

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Donald gazed at the last-named animals with awe, not unmingled with fear, when they rose from the water and looked steadily at him with their great black eyes. The Highlanders used to consider these animals enchanted beings, and some old and troublesome legends of the Ebudæ came thronging upon Donald's mind as he watched their movements among the ice. Beside him lay the unconscious remains of his leader; but he was joyful rather than grieved to find that he was dead, for he knew that he was now in a better place, and that all his troubles were at an end. To have lived would only have been a continuance of misery, and Donald upbraided the sea for having spared himself.

He sat on the point of a rock, at the foot of which rolled the surf, and he watched its advance and retreat, careless of whether he died or lived, until night descended on the sea and land, and then his northern superstitions began to prove more terrible enemies than any he had yet encountered. At last it became quite dark, and he knelt down by the corse of the laird to pray; but when, by the light of the stars, he beheld the bleached and ghastly face of the dead man, a sudden and unaccountable terror seized him, and he fled from the sea-shore into the wilderness, where he could no longer hear the dull boom of the ocean, as its eternal waves came rolling on in monotonous succession on the lonely beach.

At sunrise he again sought the shore, and, digging a grave with his weapon, gently placed the body of Mr. Stuart in the earth, rolling it first in his plaid and a piece of old sail-cloth. He covered the grave with the greenest sods he could find, and toiled the whole day, carrying stones from the shore to pile a cairn above it, and on its summit he placed a rough wooden crucifix; for old Iverach had more of the Catholic than the Protestant in his creed, and he looked upon the cross with reverence and awe. Having performed this last sad duty to the man whom, since they were boys, he had revered and loved with all the devotion of a Highland vassal, he sat down by the grave, and, regardless of his fate, heeded not a ship which was rounding a point of land, and hove in sight about four miles off. But the appearance of other things roused him from this state of apathy. His eye fell upon a gold signet ring which had fallen from the hand of Mr. Stuart, and lay on the turf beside a splendidly-jewelled dirk, which he was wont to wear on the 19th of August,* and other days which are considered gay anniversaries in the Highlands. There was likewise an antique iron casket, containing family relics, bracelets, rings, lockets, and brooches; and the piper resolved that he would return to his own country, if God spared and protected him, that he might place these trinkets in the hands of Ronald Stuart or Miss Lisle, with whom he knew they would be in safe keeping.

With this intention he quitted the beach, ascended a promontory, and made signals to the ship; but they were unseen, and he toiled along the shore from one headland to another, clambering ocean-cliffs, tearing asunder thicket and jungle, till his strength began to fail, and darkness again descended and he could see the ship no longer.

As a last resort, by means of the hard flinty stones, with which the island abounds, being the only crop it ever produces, he struck a light, and raised a beacon-fire on a rocky peak. Piling drift-wood, fallen trees, and turpentine branches upon it, he raised a giant flame, which lighted the sea and land for miles around, revealing the caverns in the far-off capes and headlands, the barren hills and rocks, the rippling ocean, and the distant sail, which glimmered white and wavering.

* The raising of Prince Charles's standard, &c. &c.

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This scheme succeeded. A boat was despatched to ascertain the meaning of this strange illumination, and the vessel, which proved to be a Quebec ship bound for Saint John's, the capital of the island, took Iverach on board. He was treated with the utmost kindness by the crew, and was carried to the town of Saint John's, whence he procured a passage in a Greenock ship,—disposing of his brooch, pistols, and some other appointments with which the Highlanders are so fond of adorning their garb, to defray his expenses.

After his return he visited Lochisla, and then traversed the west country for some time, till a recruiting serjeant of the Gordon Highlanders informed him that the regiment had returned to Scotland; upon which he set out on his way to meet them, and having that morning entered Edinburgh, he had screwed up his pipes in Charlotte-square to play for a breakfast, for he had tasted nothing that day.

As he concluded his narrative, he unstrapped a leather *dorlach*, which he carried on his back, and taking from it the iron casket, the signet ring, and the jewelled poniard, placed them in Ronald's hand, glad to be rid of them, after having brought them so far and preserved them as sacred relics, even when compelled by poverty to seek shelter in the haunts of infamy and crime, where he had preserved them untouched, though nearly perishing of want.

He had often been totally without food for four or five days, while at the same time he carried about him jewels worth four hundred pounds.

"But they werna my ain," said he; "and what could I do, though hunger is hard to thole? But a's past noo, and oich! I'll be happy yet, even in my auld and childish days; and I will end them beneath the roof-tree o' the auld tower whan the time comes, and come it must,—some day sune,—oich! oich!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONCLUSION.

RONALD'S grief at the intelligence so suddenly brought him by Iverach was of long continuance. It was the more poignant, because his father had found his tomb in a desert place and in a strange country; for it is ever the wish of a Highlander to be buried among the ashes of his ancestors. When he looked upon the blade of the poniard Donald had brought home, and saw with the thistle—the badge of his family and clan—the motto *Omne solum forti patria*, it recalled the memory of his father's pride and wrath when his boyish passion for Alice Lisle was first revealed to him, and of that moment of anger when he ordered him to quit his presence, and for ever.

The sight of the family jewels which Iverach, like a pilgrim of old, had so sacredly preserved in all his wanderings, awakened many deep regrets and dear associations. There were lockets which contained the hair of his father and mother interwoven, cut from their brows in youth, when their ringlets were glossy and brown; and there were brooches which had clasped the plaids of brothers, and rings and bracelets which had once adorned the white hands of sisters, all of whom were now gone, and above whose graves the grass had grown and withered for years.

Despite the romance-like appearance the procedure will bestow upon the story, we may not bid adieu to the hero in the midst of his grief, but must leave him what is styled, in common phraseology, "the happiest of men." After a lapse of time his sorrow passed away, and the preparations for his marriage were renewed.

On the forenoon of the 16th of July,—one must be particular on such an occasion,—an unusual bustle was apparent in and about Lord Lisle's mansion in Charlotte-square, one side of which was lined by carriages, while a crowd of women and children were collected around the door. Boys were clinging to rails and lamp-posts, and cheering and yelling with might and main, in a manner which would better have become a wedding in a country village than in the "modern Athens." The servants were all smiles and white ribbons, and clad in their gayest apparel. A flag was flying on the top of the house, and, at Campbell's particular request, the great stone sphynxes, which overlook the sides of the square, were adorned with coronets and garlands of flowers on this auspicious occasion. St. George's bells rang merrily, and the splendid band of the Highlanders were making the northern gardens of the square re-echo, as they played the old Scottish air, "Fy! let us a' to the bridal!" while the crowd sang and laughed, and the rabble of boys cheered long and lustily, like a nuisance as they were.

Ladies and gentlemen in full dress appeared at times at the windows of the front drawing-room, but they immediately retired when a shout arose from the gaping crowd, among whom the servants scattered basketfuls of white favours. To these Allan Warristoun added, now and then, a shower of red-hot penny-pieces, which he heated on a shovel, and threw over the area railings. These burned the fingers of those who caught them; the laughter became mingled with screams, and "the fun grew fast and furious."

Drawn by four fine bays at a trot, a smart new travelling-carriage fresh from the finishing hands of Crichton, came up to the door, and the people fell back on the right and left; but again rushed forward as the door was opened, and the clanking steps thrown down by the servant, who, like the smart postilions on the saddle, wore a white favour of giant size on his breast. On the dickey sat our friend old Donald Iverach, superbly garbed and armed, with his pipes under his arm, and his bonnet cocked over his grey hairs; while he screwed away at his drones, and looked more happy than ever he had done in his life.

Double imperials, all new and shining, were strapped on the top of the carriage, and a regimental bonnet-case surmounted them both. A sword and shoulder-belt, with various guns and fishing-rods, hung in the slings behind, while shooting-bags and band-boxes were piled up in the rumble, into which the servant handed a spruce little maid, cloaked and bonneted for the road.

Encircled by the collar of Saint James of Spain, the arms of Stuart and Lisle quarterly, appeared blazoned on the panels, glittering on the harness, on the carriage top, and sparkling on the ample buttons of the footman.

"Now then, John; is all right?" cried the jovial butler, appearing at the front door.

"All right, sir!" cried the postilion; and the crowd began to cheer.

Stuart came forth, with Alice leaning on his arm, and the eyes that peeped in at the door discerned a crowd of glittering dresses and happy faces behind them. Ronald was in full dress, and certainly appeared a

little nervous. Alice leant on his arm, trembling and blushing desperately, but looking so pretty in her little marriage bonnet, and so interesting in all the splendour of white satin, orange-buds, virgin-lace, smiles and blushes, that the crowd in their admiration forgot to cheer, greatly to her relief. Ronald handed her into the carriage, and sprang in after her. Up went the steps, and the door was closed.

"Good bye! God bless you, my lad!" cried Campbell, flinging an old shoe after them for luck. "Remember the old Gordon Highlanders; for it will be long before they forget you!"

"Good bye, colonel!" said Ronald. "Say the same for me to all the rest of ours."

"Adieu!" faltered Alice, kissing her little hand, and the glasses were drawn up. John leaped into his seat behind, and placed his arm round the waist of the maid-servant. Donald cried "Hoigh!" and waved his bonnet; the pipes struck up; "crack went the whip, round went the wheels," and they were off at the rate of twelve miles an hour for Lochisla.

THE END.

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